DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 270 789 CS 209 863

AUTHOR	Salomone, Ronald E., Ed.
TITLE	Teaching the Low Level Achiever.
INSTITUTION	Ohio Univ., Chillicothe. Div. of Humanities.; Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE	86
NOTE	73p.
AVAILABLE FROM	FOCUS, Division of Humanities, Ohio University, Chillicothe, OH 45601 ($10.00 for one year subscription (3 issues).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT	FOCUS: Teaching English Language Arts; v12 n2 Win 1986
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Computer Assisted Instruction; Creativity; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Instruction; Higher Education; Individualized Instruction; *Language Arts; Learning Disabilities; Literature Appreciation; *Low Achievement; Motivation Techniques; Remedial Instruction; *Slow Learners; Student Attitudes; *Teaching Methods; Tutoring; Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Intended for teachers of the English language arts, the articles in this issue offer suggestions and techniques for teaching the low level achiever. Titles and authors of the articles are as follows: (1) "A Point to Ponder" (Rachel Martin); (2) "Tracking: A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of Failure for the Low Level Achiever" (James Christopher Davis); (3) "Improving the Slow Learner and Inter-School Relations" (Georgianna G. Clark); (4) "Teaching Low-Achieving Students: Motivation for Success" (M. Kay Alderman); (5) "Bored Students? Try Board Games!" (Miriam de la Iglesia); (6) "Nurturance of Creativity" (Carol Wolf); (7) "Protecting the Slow Learner" (Georgianna G. Clark); (8) "Remedial C.A.I." (Claire Redmond); (9) "College Survival: How it Works" (Helen H. Pierson); (10) "Not Until They Know They Do Not Know" (Robert L. Wilson); (11) "Individualizing Composition Instruction through CAI Commentary Programs" (Leigh Holmes); (12) "The Example of Gargantua: Low-Level Achiever to Model Student" (Veena Kasbekar); (13) "Good Hunting: A Look at the Writing of Learning Disabled Children" (John Aylesworth); (14) "Releasing the Reluctant Writer: Attempts at Myth-Breaking and a Friendly Assault on the Mountain of Our Own Fears" (June Langford Berkley); (15) "Motivational Strategies for Low Level for Achievement Students" (Maria Di Tommaso); (16) "New Problems Need New Solutions" (Susan Archer); and (17) "Tutoring the Reluctant Learner" (Elaine A. Vacha). (HOD)

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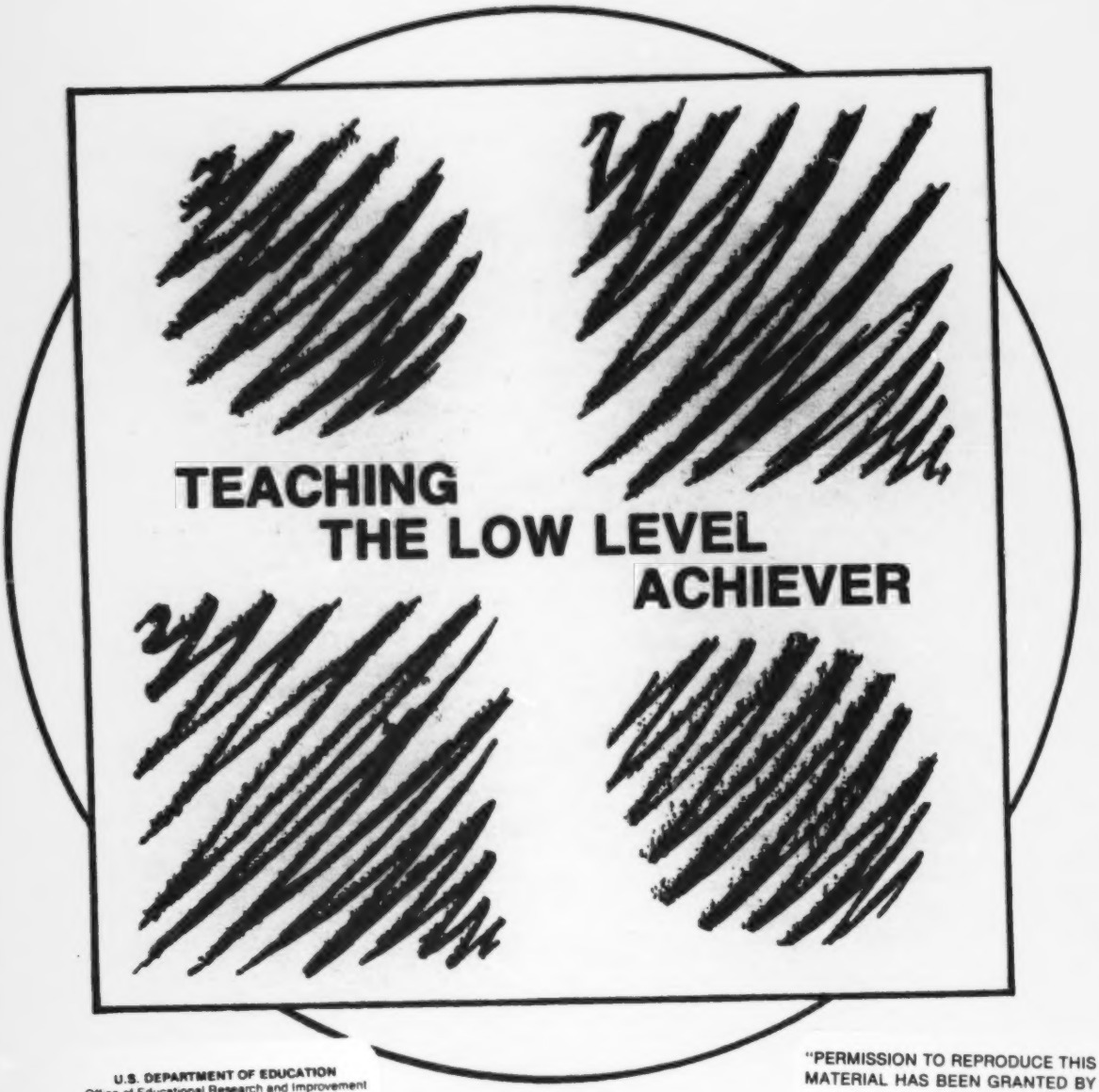

TEACHING THE LOW LEVEL ACHIEVER

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FOCUS

Volume XII, Number 2
Winter 1986

Published
jointly by the
Southeastern Ohio
Council of Teachers
of English and the Ohio
University-Chillicothe Campus
Division of Humanities

Focus:
Teaching
English
Language Arts
Bennett Hall 279
Ohio University-Chillicothe
Chillicothe, Ohio 45601

CS209863

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

FOCUS is published three times a year by the Southeastern Ohio Council of Teachers of English (SOCTE), an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English and the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts. Subscriptions are $10.00 for one year. Send check made payable to SOCTE to the editor's address below along with your name and address, including zip code.

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Ronald E. Salomone, Editor
FOCUS
Division of Humanities
Ohio University-Chillicothe
Chillicothe, Ohio 45601

Cover design: Dennis Deane

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FOCUS: TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Volume XII WINTER 1986 NUMBER 2

TEACHING THE LOW LEVEL ACHIEVER

Ronald Salomone, Editor

Veena P. Kasbekar, Guest Editor Maria Di Tommaso, Guest Editor

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A POINT TO PONDER

By
Rachel Martin

The low-level achiever: who? By definition, such an individual is one who performs below the expected or desired level, whatever that may be. If this indeed be true, then "low-level achiever" possibly could apply to everyone, at least at some point in life. It certainly does to me, for I can distinctly recall times when I did not perform up to my own expectations. It logically follows, then, that at times I undoubtedly fell far short of the expectations of those who knew me.

By nature I qualify as an apostate when the question involves labeling people, especially when those people are students who have absolutely no control over the application of these labels, much less the removal of them. Somewhere in the Ivory Palaces of Education, Someone has ordained that there be Tests, that these be administered periodically to Students, that they be evaluated, and that the Scores thereof then be attached forever to the Permanent Records of said Students, to accompany--indeed, in some cases, to precede--them throughout the remainder of their lives in the public schools. These Test Results then become Statistics, by which and with which School Authorities can determine the natural aptitudes and intellectual abilities of Students. We all know that Statistics are incontrovertible: they <u>prove</u> things. And because parents and their children are mere Mortals, unable to make Empirical Observations concerning children and completely devoid of the skills needed to interpret Test Results, only School Psychologists, School Counselors, Principals, and Teachers are privy to the interpretation and use of these Statistics.

Simply put, school officials determine that a student is a low-level achiever if that student's grade placement and chronological age are not consistent with what his or her test results indicate as the "expected or desired level." Occasionally, these results may be "corroborated" by having the student take another test, such as one of the standard IQ tests. To absolutely no one's surprise, the results of this additional test serve only to produce another set of statistics very similar to those already recorded.

At this juncture, I would like to remind you of a few points which we all know. First of all, in any cross section of people, only the upper five or six percent will fall into the "intellectually brilliant" category, with an approximately equal

percentage at the very bottom of the scale, leaving the rest of us somewhere in the remaining eighty-five to ninety percent. Second, the achievement, aptitude, and basic intelligence tests administered to students are usually timed tests. Third, some students work well under time constraints; others do not; some even panic.

With these points in mind, I would like to introduce you to a young friend of mine, who, for purposes of this discussion, shall assume the name "David." He is a 15-year-old seventh grader. That simple sentence automatically labels him "low-level achiever." His test results indeed indicate that he should be so categorized, but I find myself questioning the accuracy of such findings. For example, David had to a take a math test on which there were 20 problems. In the 45-minute class period, he was able to complete only 12. When his paper was returned, he found that he had missed only 3 of the 12 which he had finished, but his teacher had marked the remaining 8 wrong also. Given the time in which to work those 8 problems, he missed only 2 more. The point here is obvious: David received a failing grade not because he could not work the problems, but because he could not do all of them within the prescribed length of time. No consideration was given for the fact that he worked diligently during the entire period and had 9 out of 12 completed problems correct.

Similar difficulties exist for him in other classes. He is rapidly accepting constant defeat as a normal fact of his life. His parents are concerned about him and with unflagging hope search for ways to help him; they have requested conferences with his teachers and have been repeatedly told not to worry about him because they know that he is doing his best. They have been told, in fact, that although it is true that David is not where he should be as far as his age and grade placement are concerned, he actually is doing much more than his Test Results indicate that he is capable of doing. He is, therefore, an Over-Achiever!

Yet, when David brings his report card home, it shows not a single passing grade. For some bizarre reason, I have immeasurable difficulty trying to reconcile such obviously self-contradictory statements: David is a low-level achiever from whom no great accomplishments should be expected, yet he is actually an over-achiever. Explaining that to David is even more difficult.

Would I dispense with these various tests for David? Of course not. However, I would insist that their results always be interpreted by someone fully capable of making judgements about David and, in addition, that these judgements be made only after thorough research and study of all possible factors which might have affected his scores on those days when tests were administered. Even then, those results must become nothing more than aids in guiding people to assist David; they must not be viewed as any sort of ultimate decision, in essence an irrevocable evaluation of his mental ability.

To students like David, teachers appear as omniscient beings--they are authorities whose words cannot be challenged. This aura of omniscience carries with it tremendous responsibility, for those to whom this aura belongs must unceasingly remember that at best only a few students in each class will have the same interest in and enthusiasm for their subjects that they themselves have. Therefore, the teacher must evidence the wisdom requisite to individualize comments, criticisms, assignments, and suggestions for each student. While it is true that following a policy such as this inevitably creates additional work, it is also true that on occasion a simple word of praise and the smile which it elicits more than compensate for that extra work. Realizing the fragility of self-esteem, self-confidence, and motivation among students like David makes a teachehr extremely aware of the destructive force of a thoughtless or ill-timed comment.

For all students such as David, the major focus must be on restoring that self-esteem and self-confidence. For example, David has now spent several years of his life during which these two factors have steadily eroded as a result of his daily exposure to failure in school. His loss of pride and confidence has to be directly proportionate to the amount of time which he has spent in a classroom where he has been repeatedly defeated in his efforts to please the most important people in his life--his parents and his teachers. Except in rare individuals, the time eventually arrives when David, and others like him, will elect to give up, rather than to confront defeat again.

We need to help David learn that no individual, not even his teachers, can ever hope to know everything about even one subject, because there is simply too much knowledge waiting to be learned. We must show him that everyone makes mistakes from time to time and that chaos will not result if he does not get all the answers right on his tests. We must convice him that his honest efforts will be properly rewarded, even though he might not get as many problems completed as does the smartest student in his class. If we do these things, then we shall gain that magnanimity which allows us to help bring into the life of each "low-level achiever" those three elements so essential to everyone's happiness: self-esteem, self-confidence, and ultimately, success.

Finally, all of us must remember that when David entered school, he expected to learn things which would enable him to succeed in his life. After all, his parents and grandparents, his brothers and sisters, his friends and relatives--in short, everyone--had assured him that school would do this for him. Because of their persuasion, he placed his unquestioning faith in his teachers. If we do not help him do what he expects us to do, who then is the "low-level achiever"?

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TRACKING: A SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY OF FAILURE FOR THE LOW LEVEL ACHIEVER

by
James Christopher Davis

The product of a tracked high school system, I see the advantages—we were accelerated well past our lower achieving peers into a college level curriculum. We left those lower levels well behind. Indeed, we became an elite little group of scholars who were prepared for the rigors of college; we could write and read and think and speak. Yet I believe we suffered delusions of grandeur, because we thought we were better than everybody else. I remember in high school having the passing thought that our tracked system was a segregation of minds, an admitting by the system that "all men are created equal" is hypocrisy. However, we never dwelled on this because we were great literary critics and creative writers, and we were supposed to be separated from normal people. But now that I am a teacher of "low level achievers," I see that tracking may be hurting these students in several ways:

-by taking out positive role models from the classroom and placing them in upper tracks,
-by causing low self-esteem among those tracked low,
-by locking students into certain tracks with little chance of upward mobility,
-by giving students a false impression of society,
-by concentrating behavior problems in lower tracked classes, usually taught by new and inexperienced teachers,
-by reenforcing labeling among students,
-and by placing a self-fulfilling prophecy on the low level achiever.

Tracking seems to hinder slower students, because it gives them an excuse to "cop-out" on their learning, by saying, "I'm dumb, why try?" or "This is supposed to be the lowest level, why are you having us do so much?" I have heard comments like these in my classes. Also, if students read well below their grade level they are usually placed into the lower tracks. But what happens then? One might argue that this artificially stifles their abilities—it can be for them much like putting on cement shoes and trying to walk, because they are stuck in classes where only control vocabulary "dumbed-down" literature is taught; so they have little change of ever moving on to more difficult well-written literature. They are stuck with the "slow" label, with little hope for improvement. In addition, students who are tracked low rarely move out of that track, and if they do move, it i usually downward. The labels stick with the students.

This points to one of the major problems of tracking, that the system labels students. One of my "Language Skills" freshmen expressed the following opinion, "I feel that labels are very unnecessary. Labels can give off bad impressions. In my opinion everyone is a person. Labels do nothing but cause a lot of hassle, fights, and confusion. No one person is any better than another."

Effective mainstreaming is made almost impossible by tracking, as Marilyn J. Marting maintains in her article "Mainstreaming and Teaching in the Public High School," English Journal, April, 1980. She states that tracking "institutionalized the problems of differences among students," and that "in a school which maintains a track system, mainstreaming cannot work well." Marting is concerned that tracking reenforces labeling, not only of low level achievers, but especially of mainstreamed "special learners."

I have found a disturbing behavior among the higher tracked students. They usually label the lower levels "grits" or "rednecks" or equally bigoted names. What kind of prejudiced mentality does this display? What kind of elitest attitudes? Certainly this is not the rational, noble, scholarly thinking we would expect from the "cream of the crop"; this is stereotyped, empty, unlearned thinking. It would appear that schools are turning out generations who believe that "some people are created more equal than others," that society should be separated into the "haves" and "have nots," and that it indeed is separated, which is a fallacy at best. Certainly, the problems of differences among students have been institutionalized as Marting contends, and unfair, unrealistic labeling has been the product of tracking.

To illustrate how tracking and labeling affect higher level students, let me share with you what an "Advanced English" junior told me when asked about eliminating tracking. He said, "I don't want to be in with a bunch of dumb students; I wouldn't be able to learn with a bunch of grits in the class." There is elitism and snobbery packed into that statement. He is saying that he thinks he is better than certain other people, and should thus be separated from these lowers. It makes me feel as if there is some kind of educational caste system at work here on this student's mind, if not on all students' minds in the tracked system. The broader problem lies in the sociological implication that students are being segregated into closed, small groups of people with the same socio-economic background and with the same relative intelligence levels, so they are isolated from all the different types of people they will come in contact with in the world outside the classroom.

Probably the most important problem with this tracking and labeling system is how low level achievers react to it. They might not openly reject the system they are locked into, but often these students vent their frustration at being labeled by rejecting school with hostility, by being rebellious and perhaps disruptive, and by "tuning out" what is happening in class. I deal with all of these problems every day. These students may not be overtly affected by tracking, but there is the subtle impact of labeling that may be the root of some of their negative behavior toward school and teachers. Perhaps they have been given a self-fulfilling phophecy to fail.

Jonathan Kozol makes this claim in his book, Illiterate America (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1985). He states, "Tracking schemes, at present in resurgent fashion, will be recognized for what they are: archaic pedagogy and divisive social policy. Legal actions will be launched to fight the obvious denial of a child's civil rights which is inherent in the self-fulfilling prophecy of rigid track separations." (page 19)

Kozol not only challenges the legality of tracking since it violates a child's civil rights, and points out its self-fulfilling prophecy, but he also argues that tracking systems are attempts by affluent parents to isolate their children from unworthy influences. Yet, as he points out, in the "real world" this isolation is seldom possible; there is no place for the privileged to hide from the underprivileged. Furthermore, it becomes evident from his argument that the privileged have a false sense of superiority over the lower classes, and that this is a false impression of society in general.

There are two more problems with tracking that I have found as a teacher of low level achievers. One is that positive student role models are separated, for the most part, from the slower students. One might argue that this allows new leadership to emerge at the lower levels, but how much more could be learned by slower students from more advanced peers? Students do learn from each other, and by removing the top few and isolating them, the slower students never derive the benefit of their knowledge. The other problem is that tracking concentrates behavior problems in lower level classes, usually taught by new and inexperienced teachers, who have not experienced the range of motivational and behavioral problems associated with these lower level classes. When least experienced teachers are teaching the hardest classes to teach, this surely leads to accelerated "teacher burn-out."

Even though there are myriads of problems involved in the tracking of low level achievers, like lack of positive role models in class, low self-esteem, labeling, and self-fulfilling prophecies of failure, I refuse to give up. I do not go to class each period thinking that these are low level students. I do not consider them dumb or slow or unimportant; I try to challenge and motivate them. They will work as hard in my class as in any they have ever had (and believe me they me know this is true). Teachers of low level achievers are challenged by their students and by the system that has tracked them. Probably in light of this the teacher's most important duty is to help these students overcome their label, to help them work for success. The odds are stacked against the low level learners—their teachers must be willing to help them beat these odds. Yet teachers should not beat their heads into walls either. They should not have to "burn out" trying to teach their subject matter to students who have been programmed to fail. That is one of the central problems of the tracked system—just as the students are labeled to fail, so are the teachers of "low level achievers" programmed to fail, by the system that separates its students into tracks of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Troy High School
Troy, OH

IMPROVING THE SLOW LEARNER AND INTER-SCHOOL RELATIONS

by
Georgianna G. Clark

Experience teaches us several truths about the slow learner. The slow learner benefits from repetition, but drills can be stultifying. The slow learner rejects the theoretical but accepts the practical. The slow learner enjoys success but rarely achieves it. I would like to suggest a scheme that provides repetition, variety, practicality, and success. Operation Elf meets the needs while it avoids the educational pitfalls for the slow learner.

Operation Elf involves letter writing--both business and personal. We propose to answer letters that elementary school students write to Santa Claus. Business letters go to the teachers, and personal letters go to the students.

Preplanning makes this process simple and successful. Once you decide to propose this project, set a limit by selecting the school or grades that you will serve. For instance, Santa letters are not successful with students beyond third grade. When you propose this project to the class, have the following information and materials available: the full names and correct spelling of the names of those teachers whose rooms you have decided to serve, their preferred term of address (Mrs., Miss, Ms.), plain white paper and envelopes, paper clips, and pens which students may borrow for suitable collateral.

After teaching/reviewing the business letter form, begin this project by brainstorming for the information to be included in the letter. Write this list on the board. Be sure to include such items as the group making the proposal, the purpose of the letter, the grades for which the plan is intended, the date the teacher's reply is needed, where the response envelope will be posted, when the decorated mailboxes will be delivered and collected, when the answered letters wil be returned. Students then compose a rough draft of the letter in which they incorporate these items.

An alphabetical listing of the words most difficult for the slow learner to spell will save time and give the student some experience in reference skills.

adult	elves	Santa Claus
allow	first	Sincerely,
appreciate	indistinguishable	Sleigh
arrive	individualized	specially
Christmas	merry	reindeer
convenience	participate	wrapped
cursive	participation	
elementary	principal's office	

When you have approved the draft, the student is ready to do an ink copy on unlined paper. Those students who have difficulty writing on unlined paper may create a "cheat sheet." This is a piece of notebook paper that is placed beneath the plain paper. If the lines do not show through, the student may use ink to darken them. Slow learners feel more confident if paper clips are used to hold the cheat sheet in place. Give each student the name of a different teacher and the grade level so that each letter is tailored for a specific teacher and classroom. The letters must be perfect before the student is allowed to address the envelope and insert the properly folded letter.

The most difficult issue to handle is the students' roars of pain when their letters are not answered in business letter form. In the many years we have done this project, only one elementary teacher has ever responded in "proper" business letter form. Perhaps that is not all bad because it certainly proves to the slow learner how judgments of people are based upon the images they project in their letters.

While students await replies to their letters, they save various boxes to be decorated as mailboxes. When the replies arrive, have a wrapping session. A practice wrapping session in which newspaper is used will reduce the waste of more expensive Christmas wrap. It is surprising how many students have no idea how to wrap a package. This, then, becomes a practical lesson in following directions. While scissors can be used to make the mail slot, a stanley knife is easier to use. Meanwhile, save grocery sacks to serve as mailbags.

When you deliver the mailboxes to the school, tag each box with the teacher's name. As astounding as it may seem, we have had some non-participants spirit away the boxes. Furthermore, place a sheet of paper with the teacher's name inside each box. This prevents embarrassing moments if the outer tag becomes dislodged from the filled box.

Another business letter accompanies the delivery of the mailboxes. In this letter, the student expresses pleasure that the teacher has agreed to participate in the project, requests the teacher have students use either last name or initial and

assist with making sure all children's names are readable, reiterates the date the boxes are to be returned to the principal's office for collection, and reaffirms the date the answers will be delivered.

Students who have shown little interest become more active when the group discusses what sort of stationery should be used for the replies. We began by using cut-outs that were then photocopied. However, I have observed that many slow learners are quite artistic. Each year we design our own paper. We have had cut-out Christmas trees and large round ornaments. We have attached yarn hangers so that the letters have then become ornaments. Other years we have used student-designed scenes. These were then rolled, tied with yarn, and labeled with a cardbard tag bearing the child's name. No matter what stationery design the class chooses, use two different colors of stock. This prevents mix-ups if one box is partly finished when another mailbox must be opened to keep the entire class occupied.

Before the first mailbox is opened, give the following instructions:

(1) Use a pencil for the reply since corrections are easier.
(2) Use the form for a personal, not business, letter.
(3) Reply in whatever form the writer has used--printed or cursive.
(4) Personalize the reply. Respond to the individual contents--the wants, the promises of goodies to be left by the tree, and the news of improving grades.
(5) Promise nothing. You are an elf helping Santa. The most you can do is relay the message to Santa. He and he alone makes all gift decisions.
(6) As an elf you may assume a nom de plume or be assigned the number that is beside the name in the grade book.
(7) Feel free to chat about the doings at the North Pole. Let your imaginations rule!
(8) Be sure to use only that stationery designed for that particular mailbox.
(9) Bring me the finished letter so that I may find anything that needs to be corrected. When the letter is acceptable, I record the grade for you and put the letter into the mailbag.
(10) You receive a grade for each letter. This is a good opportunity to earn extra credit.

When the students bring you the answered letters, check to see that each letter is individualized. This is also an ideal opportunity to work one-on-one with your own students on individual spelling or punctuating problems. Before each mailbag is stapled shut, have students match the children's letters with the responses. We also include a special letter of appreciation to the teacher plus two extra sheets of stationery-just in case.

Once we were able to dress up as elves and deliver the letters. My class was delighted with the children's reactions. However, the project is successful as a writing project since each student creates at least two business letters and more than 30 social letters for two distinct audiences.

The slow learner benefits from the repetition, practicality, and success. His or her self-image is improved as are inter-school relations.

Hillsboro, Ohio

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The NCTE Committee on Professional Writing Networks for Teachers and Supervisors is ready to help you. If you would be interested in sharing your ideas, but feel you would like some help in writing your thoughts, the Comittee will give you suggestions and support. Send your half completed, or fully completed manuscript to Dr. Rosemary Winkeljohann, Millersville University of Pennsylvania, Department of Education, Millersville, Pennsylvania 17551. Your manuscript will then be sent to a committee member who will return it to you with suggestions.

TEACHING LOW-ACHIEVING STUDENTS: MOTIVATION FOR SUCCESS

By
M. Kay Alderman

It is safe to assume that students assigned to low achieving classrooms have a pattern of failure. This pattern of failure affects these students' expectations and subsequent learning behaviors to the extent that they have been labeled as "helpless" (Diener & Dweck). The purpose in this article is to present findings derived from research on teaching, learning, and motivation that have application for teaching low-achieving (helpless) students. A key assumption derived from the research in these areas is that teachers make a difference. In the low-achieving classroom, teachers can make differences in student achievement of course content, student motivation, and "learning how to learn." In the first part of the paper, characteristics of a success-oriented classroom will be described. The second part of the paper will describe characteristics of helpless students and present strategies for working with these students.

A Success-Oriented Classroom

Characteristics of a success-oriented classroom have been derived from findings on differences between effective and ineffective teachers and from successful motivation change programs (deCharms). The successful classroom is the beginning, but there must also be direct attention to enhancing student motivation for personal effectiveness.

The successful classroom begins with appropriate, realistic expectations by the teacher. There is considerable research that has examined the effects of teacher expectations on student achievement (Good & Brophy). For example, when teachers have low performance expectations about groups of students, they may provide less serious and interesting instruction. The key attitudes for the teacher are confidence and determination. This does not mean that they are idealistic in their expectations. Instead, it means the teacher is realistic and is aware that students have learning problems; but teachers look for ways to overcome the learning problems. It is important that students know that teachers want them to succeed. In terms of expectations, students can be made aware that they will be expected to achieve the objectives and will develop the necessary learning strategies. The appropriate expectations then are followed by appropriate instruction. Good and Brophy describe appropriate instruction as a pace that allows continued success and steady improvement.

A Successful Beginning

Effective teachers begin the school year by establishing and teaching rules and procedures necessary for a productive classroom environment (Emmer, Evertson, Sanford & Clements). It has been found that spending more time the first three weeks on rules and procedures provides more time for instruction the remainder of the year. An important part of this beginning is also teaching students "learning to learn" strategies they will need for this course. These include reading comprehension strategies, memory strategies, and any others that are necessary for success.

Mastery Approach

In a mastery approach, all students are expected to attain a given set of objectives. Mastery learning begins with objectives that are clearly achievable, then students work at the objectives until they succeed. This can be an effective approach with low-achieving students, because it has been found that unsuccessful students need clear standards about what they are expected to achieve (Covington & Beery). Motivationally, mastery learning emphasizes persistence instead of "one shot" learning. Teachers can use mastery learning principles by having students retake tests and redo assignments until they meet the criteria.

Research has also found that achievement of low-achieving students increases more when taught by direct instruction methods (Brophy & Good). Direct instruction does not enhance their motivation to learn on their own, however. Thus, it is important that teachers provide an instructional approach that will enhance their ability to learn on their own. Integrating motivational strategies of goal-setting, self-monitoring, and use of feedback enhance motivation of students.

A mastery learning approach can be combined with goal-setting since there is much research that supports the effectiveness of goal-setting. The research has generally found that goal setting is linked to higher performance. The objectives can be presented to students as goals to be attained. Proximal (short-term) goals have been found to affect productivity more than distal (long-term) goals (Bandura & Schunk). Goal-setting can be linked with student monitoring of prformance by keeping records of objectives (goals) attained and their grades. This also acts as a feedback mechanism for students. Students can then compare their present performance with prior performance. This will enable them to see progress and begin to develop perceptions of their competence. This is important as adolescents are prone to compare their performance with that of their peers. If they always perform worse than their peers, it contributes to feelings of incompetence and the helpless attitude.

A Profile of Students Who Have Failed: Helpless Students

Although a teacher structures a classroom for success, this may not be sufficient for helpless students. There has been considerable research about the motivation of these students. When individuals fail, they usually attempt to assign a cause to the failure. Four causes have been most frequently found (Bar-Tal). These causes are: not having the ability (I'm just not a writer"), not expending enough effort (I could do it if I really tried"), task difficulty ("the test was too hard"), and luck. It has been found that individuals with a pattern of failure are most likely to attribute the cause to their lack of ability. These causes have been further categorized into two dimensions, stable-unstable and internal-external. Stable-unstable refers to whether there is a past history or consistent pattern of failure. Internal-external refers to whether the student believes the cause resides within him or is an outside cause. For example, a student in a language arts class fails an exam on reading comprehension, something she has done many times. If asked why she failed, she might say she can never answer those kinds of questions or she's just not good at this subject. The causes she uses to explain failure are stable and refer to her ability. Thus, she would see no reason to do her homework since she believes she does not have the ability to read. Failure attributed to stable ability is one of the most difficult motivational problems as the student doesn't believe that anything she does will enable her to improve. Attribution of failure to an internal stable ability is a primary characteristic of "helpless students." There is a low expectation cycle in place: the more students fail, the more helpless they feel and the less effort they expend. It is likely that most students assigned to a low-achieving class display helpless characteristics. Failure has become a self-fulfilling prophecy for them. The task for the teacher is to break this failure/low expectation/helpless cycle.

Strategies for Helpless Students

In addition to the success structure described above, there need to be strategies for enhancing motivation of helpless students. The goal for helpless students is to enable them to be successful, and attribute the success to their own effort and ability. Research has found that it is possible to change the attributions that "helpless" students give for failure and this, in turn, increases their persistence (sustained effort) on task (Diener & Dweck). The following strategies are recommended:

1. Establish proximal goals for students. Be sure they have the memory/comprehension skills to attain success on these goals. The proximal goals provide them with frequent feedback and success experiences.

2. Link effort to outcome. Have them attribute the success to their effort, i.e., "I succeeded because I worked hard by doing all my homework and correcting errors." Let them know how much effort and the kind of effort that will be needed; i.e., practices, drafts, revisions after they receive corrective feedback. This specifies effort so students know what they can do when they "try hard."

3. Ability as skill. Lead them to think of ability in reading and writing as skills that can be learned rather than an ability that is unchanging. Teaching them memory and comprehension strategies can help accomplish this goal. It is better to believe that "I failed because I have not learned effective memory strategies" than "I failed because that is too hard for me to learn."

4. Is it because they cannot or will not? When students do not do an assignment, determine if it is because they do not have the necessary skills or because they are not motivated (effort). We often assume that assignments are not done because students are not motivated to do so. Students may not be able to do the assignment but do not want to admit they lack the ability. This ability may be a prerequisite skill they need to learn first.

In summary, we have presented a two-pronged approach for teaching low-achieving students. The approach begins with a teachers's expectations that learning will take place. Secondly, a mastery approach is used to provide successful experiences for students. Integrated with this approach is goal-setting, self-monitoring, and use of feedback, all strategies that will enable students to learn on their own. Third, students attribute their failure to lack of specific learning strategies rather than their ability and they attribute their success to both effort and ability. Finally this will enable students to develop a positive self-concept of their abilities.

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BORED STUDENTS? TRY BOARD GAMES!

by
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Just as a mother gives her child a "yummie" cereal and withholds the fact that it is nutritious, so may you, as the teacher, use games with your pupils and withhold the fact that they "teach." In the minds of many children, lessons are work, but games are play. The advantages of using this "play" technique include the following:

1) games replace uninteresting drills;
2) the game situation offers the students success through achievement and peer approval;
3) a game may lead students to investigate new problem-solving methods in an attempt to solve the game;
4) a game requires the student to be an active member in the learning process instead of passively absorbing the material (Krulik & Rudnick, 1983).

Not only does using well-planned games benefit your students, but it also helps you become a more effective and efficient teacher. With games, there is less paperwork to grade, the student is on-task, the need for classroom management is low, and the subject material is reinforced in the student's mind.

Designing a game is not difficult, especially if you model on a popular game such as Trivial Pursuits or Monopoly. To get you on your way, here are a few basic steps.

1) Decide what concept will be learned or enhanced. A good idea is to choose a section of a subject in their curriculum. However, do not pick too broad a concept, such as spelling or punctuation. A specific well-defined concept makes the task easier, such as spelling, homophones, or commas around appositives.

2) Determine the cognitive level of the students. A game that is too easy or too hard, whether due to the game's structure or to the cognitive development of the child, will bore or frustrate the child.

A brief hierarchy of demonstrating learning signs include:

a) recalling, defining
b) describing, comparing
c) applying
d) analyzing
e) synthesizing, predicting
f) evaluating, judging (Bloom, 1956).

Decide which one(s) fit your concept and use this in developing your game's structure (discussed in step four). Examples of these demonstrative learning signs include: recalling in the card game Concentration, applying real estate procedures in Monopoly, and analyzing the clues in the game called Clue.

Children in lower elementary levels cannot usually pass the third sign because of their cognitive development. Once they have learned to deal with the hypothetical, usually at age eleven or twelve, they are better adapted toward the higher levels of reasoning.

3) Determine the flow of the game. The flow can be through the use of dice, cards, a gamepiece, through a certain event or certain rules, or a combination of these. Sometimes the board will contain quite a bit of the information dealing with the concept, as in Life and Monopoly. If cards are necessary with a board, as in Trivial Pursuit, both will affect the way the information is handled.

4) Determine the structure of the game. The structure determines how the information will be manipulated through the tangible items (the board, cards, etc.) and through the rules. Some games manipulate the information through questions whereby correct answers enable the player to gain the most points or move the fastest. The concept information used in this instance is usually yes-or-no and straightforward, such as in Trivial Pursuits. The more complicated and flexible the material, the more diverse the manipulation can be. In this case, you would probably use a combination of the "flow-materials" described above. A case in point is Monopoly, which consists of acquiring a monopoly and buying real estate, intertwined with the chance and community chest cards. This game uses dice, money, and cards as flow-materials with the information contained in the board, cards, and rules which make up the complexity of its structure.

Now that you know the steps of game-making, here are a couple of tips to assist you.

1) Because creating a totally new game is somewhat difficult, use a spin-off of a current popular game or a game that you enjoyed as a child, such as Monopoly, Trivial Pursuits, or the card game Concentration.

2) Try to integrate flexibility into the game. If you are using a board game that uses cards, create a totally different set of cards that can be used by those who have mastered the first set. An example of this is the Genus Edition of cards for Trivial Pursuits. Or design a board that can be used with different sets of cards corresponding to individual subjects. An example of this duality is the board used with chess and checkers.

Creating a challenging game is a challenge in itself. But through designing a game or two, you can become aware of the ins-and-outs of the development process. Not only is there a great deal of satisfaction in seeing your planning efforts in concentrate form, but also it is a real thrill to see your design in action.

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Nurturance of Creativity

By
Carol Wolf

Young children delight in new creations and in new learning. They will play for hours manipulating clay or sand and creating new worlds. They persist in their attempts to master new skills--jumping, saying a nursery rhyme, drawing a happy face. School children can lose this delight in creativity and in learning when they become imprisoned by bars of vocabulary lists, workbook sheets, and set patterns of learning. The natural creativity of the child is suppressed rather than nurtured, and the child becomes a reluctant learner. Since the students cannot express their natural curiosity and cannot create understanding for themselves, they are unwilling to accept another's pronouncements. Creative teachers who embrace their students' creativity can help the reluctant learners to find ways to express themselves and to make the learning their own.

What is creativity and why should we as teachers be concerned with it? Do current educational practices nurture or suppress creativity?

Creativity probably has as many definitions as the number of individuals who try to define it. It is an illusive concept tied to originality, new associations, the uncommon, giftedness, and self-expression. The word creativity is derived from the Latin creare (to make) and from the Greek Krainein (to fulfill). (Young, 1985, p. 77) John Young defines creativity as "the skill of bringing about something new and valuable." He justifies the inclusion of the three elements in his definition. Skills are an important aspect because they enable one to repeat fortuituous events and to re-set conditions so that discoveries can be made. The result of the creative process is new and valuable. Although some would argue that creativity involves an approach to life--self fulfillment, this paper concerns the creative process of bringing about something new and valuable. This process is more than a hunch or "lightning bolt" thought. Something new and valuable can be produced only after deliberation and evaluation. The idea must take form. (Young, 1985, pp. 77-81) The creative process is defined thus by James A. Smith: "Sinking down taps into our past experiences and put these selected experiences together into new patterns, new ideas or new products." (1966, p.4)

The future needs individuals who can respond to the changing needs of society with this "something new and valuable." John Naisbitt in his book Megatrends explains ten major trends that

are reshaping American society's future. He describes the 1980's as a parenthesis--a time between eras.

> Although the time between eras is uncertain, it is a great and yeasty time, filled with opportunity. If we can learn to make uncertainty our friend, we can achieve much more than in stable eras.
>
> In stable eras, everything has a name and everything knows its place, and we can leverage very little.
>
> But in the time of the parenthesis we have extraordinary leverage and influence--individually, professionally, and institutionally--if we can only get a clear sense, a clear conception, a clear vision, of the road ahead.
>
> Mr God, what a fantastic time to be alive!
>
> (1984, p. 283)

In this changing society, creativity can be that "yeast" that promotes growth. This is certainly a time that calls for "new patterns, new ideas, and new products."

How is education responding to this challenge to nurture creativity--to prepare individuals to face a changing world? Too often, the students in today's schools receive reinforcement only for parroting back the "one" right answer. Original thinking is not encouraged. Theodore Sizer describes the situation in too many of our nation's classrooms: "There are too few rewards for being inquisitive; there rarely is extra credit for the ingenious proof." (1984, p. 55) "Schools that always insist on the right answer, with no concern as to how a student reaches it, smother the student's efforts to become an effective intuitive thinker." (1984, p. 105) The back-to-basics movement is really a reinforcement of this heavy emphasis on single right answers. Administrators in schools are walking a fence, trying to enable their students to gain the necessary skills to pass required tests at the same time schools are forced to work within curtailed budgets. The watchwords of the day become: "Don't make waves." "Don't rock the boat." "That's the way we've always done it." These sayings reflect the predominant attitude. Too many educators are responding to the challenge of these times by suppressing creativity and by hiding their heads in the sand--denying the demands of this era, the need for changing curriculum and new, creative teaching methodology.

In Creative Growth Games, Eugene Raudsepp, President of Princeton Creative Research, Inc., discusses this suppression of creativity in our socialization process.

> Almost from the first grade on--and sometimes earlier--we are compelled to conform to a system which progressively constricts our freedom to imagine and to create new ideas. The erosion of our inborn creativity begins early and continues throughout our lives. While ostensibly preparing us for responsible adulthood, the enculturation

> and maturing processes most of us go through manage to conventionalize us to a degree where creative curiosity and wonder almost cease to exist. It is this that probably prompted the famous French psychologist, Jean Piaget, to state recently: "If you want to be creative, stay in part a child, with the creativity and invention that characterizes children before they are deformed by adult society." (1977, p. 4)

What barriers to creativity does education--in its pursuit of high test scores--instill? Why do children lose their love of learning and exploration and their joy in doing something new?

In trying to identify this loss of the love of learning, John Holt studied children in the classroom--particularly the interaction of teacher and student in questioning. He was concerned with the failure of children to learn when grades become so all important that the name of the game is "figure out what the teacher wants"--not "understand the facts." Fear of making a mistake and fear of the label of bad grades inhibit creativity. The student uses his/her thought processes to isolate the teacher cues to identify the correct, expected response, not to reflect on the facts. Over and over again, John Holt reported children changing their answers in response to the nonverbal cues of their teachers. It was not information that changed their minds. In another class, the children noticed that the teacher stood near the column of the next right answer. They watched her and didn't concentrate on the lesson. Another child manipulated her teacher into keep giving her simpler and simpler questions until she could answer easily and without fear of failure. Children concentrated their creative thinking to associate certain teacher behaviors with the "correct response." The fear of failure is a true barrier to the creative thinking needed in these times.

Another barrier to creativity is functional fixedness. Objects are seen to have only certain functions, and unconventional uses are not considered. (A tin can is a container. The person has difficulty envisioning its use as a rolling pin, a biscuit cutter, or a robot arm.) Teachers and instructional texts promote this barrier when only the usual functions are stressed. In the name of concept and object instruction, the textbooks and teachers stress the common uses. However, we have all needed to hammer something when a hammer wasn't available. Teachers need to ask the class, "What could you use if you didn't have a hammer?" Shoes and rocks can serve for this purpose although this is not the primary purpose for either. As teachers we must point out unusual or unconventional uses of materials when they occur in the classroom and in books so that this functional fixedness is decreased.

Response set (rigidity) can be a huge barrier to creative thinking. This is the unwillingness to give up what has worked before. In many math texts, the problems are presented in sections. The same response set is needed for every problem on

that page, in that section, or in that unit. Children learn to respond to key words such as altogether or left over. Story problems requiring only addition follow the addition text section, and extraneous facts are not given. Children expect to be able to use their response sets, and creative answers are certainly not encouraged. In fact, children can become quite upset when the problem does not fit the response set they have learned. My daughter's classmate became "almost hysterical" because her division problem ended with no remainder. The problems on that page all had remainders. She finally agreed, after many tears, to write a remainder of zero. How can education encourage creativity when it builds such huge barriers in response sets?

Creativity must be nurtured in the classroom to prepare the student for the ever-changing tomorrow. The first step in this nurturance is the elimination--or at least the lessening--of the factors that suppress and inhibit creativity. The second step is the active encouragement of originality and divergent thinking. Divergent questions have more than one answer. They are the questions that ask: "What would happen if . . .?" or "How would you describe . . .?" If the teacher has already decided what the answers should be, she is not expecting much creative talent. There are twenty of thirty minds creating now, and the ideas should surpass her answers.

Core content--math facts, parts of speech, history dates--is often taught with convergent questions, that is, questions that ask for only one answer. James Smith illustrates the difference in presenting such lessons creatively and noncreatively. Miss Arnold proceeded to teach the verb function from a definition and a set list of verbs of action and of being. The children then filled in work sheets that further exemplified these specific requirements for verbs. Unfortunately, words in our English language can have a number of uses and functions. Miss Dawson, in contrast, started by letting the children describe the weather--a nasty day with sleet and gusts of wind. One child called it a "spanking wind." From that, the children were encouraged to think up different ways that spanking could be used in a sentence. The word was used in five sentences in three functions--verb, adjective, and noun. (1966, pp. 36-39) The students were still learning parts of speech, but they were concentrating on the rich variety of usage that English allows. Of course core content must be taught, but it can be taught in a creative manner that encourages thought and divergent thinking.

Creativity must be nurtured by teaching specific helpful techniques. In brainstorming, a proven creative technique, the participants list as many ideas as possible within a specified time period. During this time, the ideas are not evaluated but can be elaborated or modified. Freeing the student of the judgemental factor allows more creativity to surface. The teacher becomes the facilitator of creativity by such comments as "Let's build on Sue's idea." "What if we looked at it upside down?" "Can we make it smaller or bigger?" "Does this

remind you of something else?" This technique can be practiced in the classroom when a problem arises--how to decorate a bulletin board, where to go for a field trip, what kind of Valentine party to have. When the children learn this technique, they can practice it individually for theme topics, history projects, or descriptive adjectives. Brainstorming is a specific creativity technique useful in the classroom and certainly useful in the outside world.

Creativity can also be nurtured by presenting mind stretching games and exercises. There are a number of books devoted to such games. Creative Growth Games and More Creative Growth Games include puzzles and explanations of creative processes. Alice in Puzzle-land and Science Fiction Puzzle Tales are also sources of "brain-teasers." Teachers must be aware of these types of exercises and incorporate them into classroom use. Perhaps the class could have a puzzle a day--or a week--that really calls for creative thinking. Some of these puzzles are specifically designed to attack creative barriers. A tool must be utilized in a new way (fighting functional fixation), or various methods must be employed in the same problem (destroying response set). In other games, brainstorming can bring multiple answers to describe an ink blot or doodle. As in the development of most skills, children need a chance to practice creative thinking without fear and reprisals.

Teachers need to create an environment where creative thinking is valued and encouraged. They must develop a tolerance for new ideas and must not force set patterns of learning or understanding. Divergent as well as convergent questions should be utilized in teaching new material. The children must be encouraged to value their own creative thinking and that of their classmates, and fear of failure must not be allowed to inhibit learning and creating. In reality, the teacher must first become a creative person so that he/she can respond to the changing needs of the students in new and imaginative ways. After all, one of the primary functions of the teacher is to serve as a role model. Let's make that role model a creative teacher who uses new ideas and responds favorably when others express their creativity. This is so very necessary for the future of our nation and of the world.

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PROTECTING THE SLOW LEARNER

by
Georgianna G. Clark

Save all those junk-mail catalogs. They work well for the slow learners. Distribute them to the class. Direct students to locate any three items. Price is no object! The following information is to be gleaned: company name and address, catalogue number, code words describing the item, price, and weight/shipping cost. Color and size are necessary on only certain items. The colorful catalogues lure the reluctant reader. This allows a wonderful opportunity for individualization since catalogues have their own writing styles, too. Some tuck the vital material in the center, while others have theirs in front. Some catalogues show both a regular price and a discount price. This requires special attention on both the student's and teacher's parts to prevent overpayment. Allow an entire class period for this pleasure reading.

The next session is best devoted to using this information to compose an order letter. A paradigm may be composed by teacher and class, or one may be purchased from a company such as Perfection Forms. Since the student must order more than one of a single item, the @ is utilized, and there must be a column for extensions.

Sales tax poses some practical problems. Should one pay it to an out-of-state company? (Only if it has outlets in Ohio.) Can one avoid tax payment by sending an order to an out-of-state J.C. Penney? (No, because it has Ohio outlets.) What is current Ohio sales tax? What do you mean point oh five five? Five and a half is five point five. What do you mean I'm paying more tax than the cost of the items? Common sense? Do I pay tax on shipping too? What if I just charge it and let them do the calculating? What is a credit rating? Why are we doing math in English class?

If you've survived this barrage, the rest is easy. Somehow the student must indicate payment method. We'll assume he or she does not yet have the credit rating necessary for a charge account. The choice of check or money order can then be examined.

Have the students do a pencil draft on notebook paper. Once that has been teacher-approved, give each student two sheets of unlined paper and a piece of carbon paper. Explain the necessity of having a copy in case there is a foul up on the order. Slow learners are not conscious of not writing in straight lines. An easy solution to this is for each one to modify a sheet of notepaper so that it is a cheat sheet. A darkened vertical line along the right side will show through the white paper and act as a guide. Horizontal lines may be darkened if the student has trouble seeing them. Use ink rather than pencil for the darkening because it won't rub off so easily. Have students make a sandwich starting from the bottom with white paper, carbon, lined paper (a.k.a. cheat sheet), white paper. A paperclip at the top and one at the bottom hold this package together.

The student then uses ink to copy his/her penciled draft onto the white paper. The effect is to convince a reader that this order is from a business executive, not some high school student.

A later follow-up is to retrieve the carbon from the student's folder and write a complaint letter. Several weeks later, the carbons of the order and complaint letters can be assembled and a fictitious complaint filed with the post office, the local newspaper problem-solving column, or Better Business Bureau.

The practicality of this plan appeals to the slow learner.

Hillsboro, OH 45133

A CALL FOR PROPOSALS

The NCTE Committee on Instructional Technology is charged with the task of revieving existing teacher-training programs on integrating computers into the English curriculum. As part of our task, we plan to assemble and publish, in a book-length collection, a set of essays on existing programs that train educators to use computers in English classrooms.

We envision these essays as being both descriptive of a program's operation and evaluative in nature. We hope to receive essays from elementary, secondary, and college teachers of English; and essays describing formal teacher-education programs, informal in-service programs, and faculty-development efforts. We plan, in other words, to assemble a set of representative progras descriptions in one valuable resource.

Anyone interested in submitting an essay for this collection should send a two-page proposal to Cynthia Selfe, Humanities Department, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931, (906) 487-2447. Deadline: May 30, 1986.

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REMEDIAL C.A.L

by
Claire Redmond

In questioning the effect of C.A.L, our temptation is to measure student achievement before C.A.L and after C.A.L In doing so we may be missing some of the essential features, that is, the attitudes students bring with them to learning and their definition of themselves as learners. The success of an instructional program - or its failure - may depend as heavily on what students bring with them as on the design and content of the program itself. The importance of this caution, which most instructors would readily acknowledge, was brought home to me as I observed student performance in a Remedial Composition class that made use of C.A.L

For ten years I was an instructor on all levels of English at a two-year open-admissions college in New England. In addition to my instructional duties, I was the Director of the Skills Lab and testing and placement. The steady increase in the enrollment in remedial English courses at this particular institution reflected the growing need for developmental programs at the two-year college. In general, students needing remediation are identified through their academic records or placement tests and placed in special classes designed to increase proficiency in reading and writing skills. These classes aim to develop competence not only for degree completion but also for employment or advanced education. This places considerable demand on instructional techniques since in most two-year institutions these students not only have to raise their performance level through remediation but also have to maintain passing grades in the core courses where they are mainstreamed.

From their placement level, however, it appears that these students have not regarded academic courses emphasizing reading and writing as ends in themselves. In addition, the student often resents the remedial placement and feels a stigma. As a result, the instructor's objectives and instructional methods become important because they are crucial to the student's success.

The English requirements at this two-year college were six credits for the Associate Degree. If students placed at the remedial level, their track would be Remedial English — 3 credits and mainstreamed into Composition and Literature I — 3 credits versus the Composition & Literature I & II track. Therefore, all remedial students, college wide, were required to complete a one semester, developmental English course. Recognizing that all institutions must address their particular levels of remediation, the following curriculum is not considered a standard remedial curriculum; however, it was applicable at this institution at the time. Upon completion of this course, the student was able to accomplish the following: to identify, define and describe the function of every word in a sentence; to identify the types of sentences; and to demonstrate proficiency in the preparation of original essays. Unit tests on grammar were scheduled through the course.

Considering the demands of the curriculum, the time limit and the students' attitudes, I researched alternate teaching methods with special interest in the use of the computer. The developed programs for grammar were expensive and at times incompatible with curriculum. After reading Helen Schwartz's article, "Monsters & Mentors: Computer Applications for Humanistic Education", which reviewed the Drill and Practice Program - Grammar - at Oakland, I decided to explore her suggestions to teachers interested in using the computer. The article not only suggested ways to begin designing software but also encouraged the development and integration of the software.* Since this institution seemed to serve as representative example of an open admission population and curriculum, I became interested in the possible use of the computer at the remedial level of instruction. If C.A.L were adopted, I considered two important questions: Could the use of the computer in a remedial setting assist in removing the stigma of remedial? Would the students using C.A.L come to regard the course as teaching necessary skills that would transfer to writing in other courses?

For the following semester, I rewrote the grammatical part of the curriculum to include the aid of the computer. I coordinated my efforts with the computer science department to have two senior computer science students program the material. Since all computer science students must complete an internship for training and credit, this project provided them with on-campus jobs. The two students selected were also employed by me in the Skills Lab as peer tutors and were acquainted with the students.

To the students in the course, the main objective of the computer was to serve as a means of drill, self testing, and overview for unit tests. It was regarded as a supplementary tool and was never regarded as a replacement for classroom instruction.

Placement into the remedial class was based on a vocabulary and reading comprehension test and a writing sample. The remedial class that I taught consisted of twenty students enrolled in allied health and business programs. I further divided the class into two groups. Group A had a mean reading level at grade eight and greater deficiency in writing, namely, problems in syntax, organization, unity and coherence. Group A was designated as the Computer Group. Students in Group A did the overview for the test on the computer. Printouts were provided designating their weaknesses to enable the students to concentrate on these areas in preparation for the test. Group B was academically higher; their mean reading level was at grade eleven. Although their writing skills were not proficient to be placed in the regular track of courses, they were not as deficient as those of Group A. Students in Group B received the same instruction and similar test overview. However, there was only one difference. Students in Group B did the overview for homework and corrected it in class.

The data presented will concentrate on a brief description of the instruction for the tests, Group A's performance on the computer, and a comparison of test scores.

In preparation for Test #1, instruction concentrated on four parts of speech. The objective was to make the students aware of the S-V-O sentence pattern and phrases in relation to the individual words in the sentence. Mastery of this unit was important for writing and advanced grammar skills.

For Test #2, the areas of Test #1 were reinforced plus additional parts of speech. The subject-verb-complement and the subject-verb-adjective patterns following linking verbs were included to help the students understand a few troublesome usage problems later in writing.

Test #3 covered the rules of agreement. The uses of the prepositional phrase

and parenthetical phrase were reviewed and studied in conjunction with the rules of agreement. Since these rules were studied in both independent and dependent clauses, the three types of sentences — simple, compound and complex — and the necessary punctuation were studied. The objective was to have the students avoid sentence fragments by recognizing various types of sentences as well as subordinate clauses as parts of a sentence.

Test #4 concentrated on subordinating clauses as an important grammatical unit that expresses a secondary idea in relation to the main clause. The student was responsible for recognizing and determining the clause's function in the sentence.

In preparation for Test #5, singular and plural pronouns and reflective pronouns were reviewed. The student was responsible for selecting the correct pronoun, identifying the proper case — Nominative, Possessive and Objective — and indicating the function in the sentence. Students were also required to understand pronoun-antecedent agreement.

During the first drill, Group A showed initial lack of familiarity despite an instructional overview on the computer. Since they were more aware of the machine, they appeared nervous with the teacher and tutors. At first they tried to guess and did not question wrong answers. However, they immediately saw the need for proper spelling.

During the second drill, the group become more competitive. Although they were informed these overviews served as drill and learning for them, there still was the concern for "getting it right". The word "test" was changed on the program to "drill". A cut score was established. If a student reached a certain number of incorrect answers, the student was responsible for making an appointment for additional drill on the computer. At this drill session, students began to request tutoring since explanations of correct rules were not provided in the program. A cut score was also established in the classroom. Students in Group B were responsible for making an appointment with me or the tutors in the Skills Lab to obtain tutoring and additional drill sheets.

Attitudinal differences became apparent during the third drill session. Students were now studying and asking questions while waiting to use the terminal. The majority of questions were involved with the subject matter; fewer questions were involved with the computer itself. There were fewer spelling errors due to the recognition for the need for accuracy. The program for this drill was designed to require the students to read the directions carefully.

During the drill sessions #4 and #5, students in Group A were now questioning wrong answers. They were no longer intimidated by the machine. They read directions and proceeded as if it were common practice. They were now knowledgeable about terminal procedures, and their concentration was on the subject matter. The awareness of the need for accuracy was still prevalent. Students were more vocal regarding their weak points and recognized these were areas for further study. Those who were not satisfied with their first printout of scores volunteered to return to the terminal to improve their knowledge and readiness for the test. The printout of scores was now generally used for study in preparation for the test. This was in contrast to Group B. Students in Group B did not visit the Language Skills Lab. When the class ended, they considered the work completed.

The test results were as follows:

	GROUP A	GROUP B
TEST #1	75%	87%
TEST #2	72%	80%
TEST #3	73%	79%
TEST #4	76%	73%
TEST #5	79%	73%

Although this was a one semester pilot project, the scores indicated to me certain main advantages of the project. Although students in Group A were academically lower, they showed slight improvement and greater interest, while students in Group B steadily declined. The printout served as a valuable study guide for Group B. Group A also chose to utilize the tutoring at the terminal. These same tutors were available in the Skills Lab but Group B did not choose to utilize the service in that setting. Motivation was a significant factor and could be identified as an important variable of performance.

Since student feedback was an important part of the project, students in Group A were encouraged to communicate their feelings. A student questionnaire was submitted to these students and revealed feedback on the use of the computer. The results of the survey are as follows: 90% wanted C.A.L versus total classroom instruction; 100% wanted C.A.L in other courses.

MORE LEARNING ON THE COMPUTER COMPUTER HOLDS INTEREST

80% - Yes	90% - Always
20% - Somewhat	10% - Sometimes
0% - No	0% - Never

The section for further comments revealed that the students regarded the computer as a learning tool. The immediate feedback on mistakes was considered very helpful. The students recognized the need for accuracy (spelling) and even felt it helped with their reading. 20% of the students stated they found grammar books boring and at times confusing. All students found the project stimulating and fun. However, they did cite down-time as an unreliable feature.

Based on my observation, student feedback and scores, I arrived at the following conclusions. Significant attitudes developed during the project. Group A showed an increased awareness of their deficiencies and became more academically oriented in that they wanted to learn and progress. Group B's attitude was one of finishing the course and obtaining credit. The stigma of remedial was removed to the extent that students in Group A boasted of their computer experience. They no longer felt isolated in the college community but considered it a privilege to be able to go to the computer room to use the terminals for their course work. They became active learners to the extent they even offered programming suggestions for future users.

Although students were placed based on their reading levels as well as the writing sample, the college offered no specific curriculum or course that addressed their reading deficiencies. During the course of the project, I was working with the programmers on programming a reading program for the Skills Lab. Students in both groups showed interest in coming to the Lab for the program.

Throughout the project the students were engaged in the writing portion of the curriculum. In regard to the writing objectives of the course, an important consideration of the project was the transference of these studied skills. The teaching of grammar will give precision in agreement and in sentence form, but now the studens must learn to say something; otherwise form will predominate. These drills and practice skills must be mastered and now must be transferred to the communication process. Students received direct instruction. Peer evaluation using the student's own writing was used in workshop sessions in class for revision. During these sessions, all students received an edit sheet. Requirements were provided by me based on the instruction for the particular assignment. The first edit concentrated on content and organization and the second edit concentrated on certain stylistic problems. During the second workshop, students in Group A showed a more confident awareness and transference of the drill and practice skills.

C.A.L in this setting was successful because the students themselves redefined their roles as learners. The attitude of Group A became one of active participants versus Group B — passive credit seekers. When using this instructional strategy — C.A.L — as a teacher I learned in order to measure its effectiveness, the students' self images and attitudes must be built into its use. Addressing this variable can have a marked impact on them personnally and likewise on them academically. C.A.L was a means to many ends.

There were advantages not only for the remedial students but also for the computer science students. Both students graduated and were accepted at a four year college as computer science majors. Their internship credits were accepted as transfer credit for a core computer course. The two departments — English & Computer Science — served each other well.

NOTE

*Helen Schwartz, "Monsters and Mentors: Computer Applications for Humanistic Education", College English, 44, Number 2 (February 1982), 141-52.

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COLLEGE SURVIVAL: HOW IT WORKS

By
Helen H. Pierson

A successful business college prepares graduates to fit into the working world with a minimum of stress. Ideally, a placement officer arranges a course of study based on a student's interests; students collect their books and materials, attend class, and a certain time later receive a graduation certificate.

Realistically, the school and the student face various obstacles in the process from the time of admittance to the day of the student's termination.

One business school in Phoenix, AZ, North American College, is facing these obstacles and trying to overcome them. What are the major areas of concern at NAC?

1. Bridging the gap between poor habits and attitudes from high school to instilling proper behavior and training for good skills.
2. Reducing cultural and language differences.
3. Motivating to study and practice.
4. Keeping the student in school.
5. Determining student priorities.
6. Managing time.
7. Handling stress.
8. Establishing goals and following through.

First, NAC maintains a very structured program with basic norms set for classes and definite rules and standards for behavior and achievement. Performance, attendance, behavior, proper dress, and a sense of responsibility are stressed in order to mirror the "real world" of business.

NAC is also adapting new techniques and innovative courses directed at reducing problem factors, while aimed at increasing success situations.

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Upon entrance, students are required to take "College Survival," a course aimed at preparing . . . students with skills needed to successfully cope with college study and adjust on the job" (North American College Catalog for 1985-1986, p.35). There are seven units of study in the course:

1. Time Management--learning to use time wisely, determining lists of important "to do" activities, and keeping calendars as schedules to follow.

2. Study Skills--taking notes, outlining, preparing for tests, relieving test anxieties, and developing textbook reading skills.

3. Goal Setting--establishing direction in their lives, determining wants and needs, finding ways to achieve their goals.

4. Strength Awareness--realizing and capitalizing on positive habits.

5. Positive Mental Attitude--daily reinforcing the feeling "I'm good"; "I'm worth something"; "I will get better."

6. Assertiveness--realizing the difference between passive, assertive, aggressive; learning to be assertive; understanding and using effective body language.

7. Listening Skills--"tuning in," staying with the subject, understanding what is said.

These are the emphasized sections of the course, but there are also other benefits that appear as a result of this class. Attitude changes occur--initially, the student may be on the defensive again, due to previous negative attitudes towards school. His frustration level is high; his accomplishment level is low; therefore, he may indicate the idea of "ok, go ahead and try to teach me. I dare you." As he realizes mastery of one task at a time, he takes the more positive attitude of "ok, you're helping me, maybe I can do something after all." Thus the student goes from the idea of what everyone owes him to the thoughts of what he can do to help himself.

Because many students are returning to school with past failure or drop-out attitudes, they are initially shy. The College Survival Course shows them that others have the same problems and needs. There is concern and caring--lines of communication open up. The old saying "Misery loves company" applies in a positive manner when they realize that others have the same or more involved problems. From there, they can take the second step to helping others reduce stressful situations and realize positive goals.

Another value of this course is that it helps keep students in school. They learn that when they are in class they are getting information and practice; when they are not present, they are losing. They begin to overcome absenteeism due to money problems, due to lack of motivation or uninterest because they find ways of combating these problems. There are friends now for car-pooling, for talking over problems, for helping find jobs. Life begins to look brighter; school starts to seem important. The change in attitude is magical--attendance goes up; interest blossoms.

Hear what students and teachers say about this one new course:

> "College Survival is important for NAC because many students haven't been in school for a long time and they have forgotten work and study habits."
>
> "The class lets you know where you stand."
>
> "It's informative and my communication with people is greatly improved."
>
> "Study skills should be emphasized over goal setting and attitudes because, once we have the skills, we can look ahead on our own."
>
> "As a teacher, I see a positive change in the students who have had College Survival in respect to their willingness to attack a problem and to work on their own. Former students were inclined to be hesitant, to rely on our teacher's approval to go ahead. The post-College-Survival students have more confidence in their abilities."

Business Survival is not, however, a panacea for all the difficulties NAC faces. Another area of concern is the cultural difference and language difficulties of the Southwest student. So that this problem can be minimized, teachers spend extra time with students who have weak English skills. Teachers are assigned a number of students to counsel--these students know the teacher and are free to discuss any problems that are standing in the way of their success in school. This is an unusual plus because it is personalized--teachers and students can communicate easier since they have already spent time together in the classroom. Most often, schools hire someone as a counselor to take care of all student concerns. The one-to-one approach that NAC uses between teachers and students fosters emotional support. Simple understanding and showing concern go a long way in helping the students over rough times.

An in-school G.E.D. program is now in progress. It serves to reinforce learning skills by having the students study on their own, attend tutorial sessions, and master proficiency tests.

Here again, this program shows students that somebody cares and will give them individualized instruction to help overcome deficiencies. Getting the G.E.D. is another success.

Finally, NAC realizes the importance of training people to the best of their abilities. The College aims to motivate students to see the results of their efforts. New courses, continued enforcement of high standards, and realistic goal setting are ways that NAC is meeting the challenge of keeping students in school, while maintaining positive goals.

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CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The NCTE Commission on Composition invites educators at all levels--elementary, middle, secondary, college--to submit manuscripts for a proposed publication POLITICAL FORCES AFFECTING THE WRITING CLASSROOM K-16 reflecting its position on the essential principles in the teaching of composition. (See "Teaching Composition: A Position Statement," available through NCTE.)

Authors should not only summarize the current state of knowledge on the various issues suggested in the Statement, but they should shape this knowledge into arguments educators who want to promote good writing instruction can use with uninformed administrators, teachers, parents, and legislators. These essays may address grammar, tests, grades, computers, peer tutors, learning centers, writing within the community, basic writers, as well as other subjects which develop ideas and assumptions suggested by the Statement.

Manuscripts may range in length from ten to twenty-five pages, double-spaced typed. The 1984 MLA parenthetical documentation in author and work style should be used with "Works Cited" appearing on a separate page. Two copies should be submitted, with the author's name, address, and phone number on a separate page. Two copies should be submitted, with the author's name, address, and phone number on the title page attached to the front of each copy. Manuscripts should be mailed by 30 September 1986 to Joyce Armstrong Carroll, Department of English and Writing, McMurray College, Abilene, TX 79697.

NOT UNTIL THEY KNOW THEY DO NOT KNOW

by
Robert L. Wilson

One of the greatest dilemmas facing students in developmental classes, as well as teachers of those students, is the fact that so often these students don't know they they don't know. On the heels of repeated drills, they almost always give the impression of confidence, that they believe they understand the concept introduced that day. And I, in turn, grow accustomed to leaving clas with the same sense of euphoria. However, in recent days, I've come to learn that the perceptions of these students are rarely valid.

I've learned not to trust the perceptions of low-level achievers, not out of disrespect but out of repeated disappointment in their test results. My expectations of at least passing scores are too often met with performance scores in the 20-30 percent range.

By and large, these students have almost no sense of language. One cannot help but wonder how students lacking such basic concepts as phrasal syntax, sentence subjects, and terminal punctuation ever managed a high school diploma. Yet, they are enrolled in college, too ill-equiped to be permitted into any entry-level writing course. What, then, does the teacher of language-deficient students do?

In a ten-week term, my task is to teach them the equivalent of a year's worth of language skills each week. And that challenge is totally overwhelming to almost all of them. What I most often observe is an attempt to "wing it," probably the same approach they took to learning language during their years in public school. It may have gotten them credit then, but now they must pay the price. Suddenly, the something-for-nothing philosophy doesn't work, and they are desperate. . .and desperately deficient.

Somewhere in the course of teaching language skills, I need to help these students increase their perceptual awareness. Every day, in the course of teaching, I am working to help them realize whether they do/don't have a grasp of concepts. To begin every class meeting, I give them a worksheet of exercises to complete, exercises covering the previous day's topic. I collect and mark them, but don't put grades on them. The sole purpose is to make the students aware of their grasp of each topic prior to the test over that material. It's an awareness exercise that will help them realize how much preparation, if any, they need to make prior to the test itself.

More recently, I've taken to insisting that they spend out-of-class time at the Learning Center where virtually every skill taught in the developmental course can be studied in a variety of language-based computer programs. There, students can proceed at their own pace and work through programs as many times as they need to in an effort to grasp the concepts.

Out of necessity, I've also resorted to insisting(?) on peer tutoring, a service available at a nominal cost on our campus. Their level of deficiency being so great, most students need every available resource to get caught up.

The situation these students find themselves in, in college, is one that requires high-level commitment. And what I suspect is that, in most instances, there has been little, if any, commitment previously. Regrettably, too few are willing to make the kinds of investments that are imperative to their success. Too few know how to study and fewer still have the desire to. But without that high-level commitment, there is little chance for them to succeed.

I suspect that commitment is, in part, the result of an awareness of need. Not until the need is perceived is it likely that many students will put forth the necessary commitment required to succeed. So, my first priority with this constituency is to create awareness, preferably a heightened awareness, of where their deficiencies lie and what the extremity of those deficiencies is. Once they are aware, the likelihood increases that they will spend their time profitably in the attempt to make up for lost time.

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INDIVIDUALIZING COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION THROUGH CAI COMMENTARY PROGRAMS

by
Leigh H. Holmes

To locate forms of individualized instruction relevant to CAI commentary programs, one finds Arthur Appleby's discussions in TRADITION AND REFORM IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH useful; Appleby is also helpful in establishing an historical framework for individualized instruction in English teaching. Among the earliest (1920's) forms of individualization, Appleby tells us, was mastery learning, a concept pertinent to many forms of computer-assisted instruction and involving identification of subcomponent activities necessary for accomplishing learning objectives and developed by Henry C. Morrison. Another applicable concept was the "Dalton contract" whereby students' learning became individualized through plans of study worked out with instructors (91-94). Although Appleby did not organize the ways in which individualization was being emphasized in the sixties and early seventies, many of us who have been around long enough recognize that English instruction in those years was well represented by Steven Tchudi's special issue of ENGLISH JOURNAL in November, 1975. That issue provided readers with the sense that individualization indeed is a fundamental and continuing goal of English instruction; in the issue Margaret Rinkel identified some twelve forms of individualization (32-39), including tutoring, of which computer-assisted commentary programs are a form and will be my focus here.

What is a computer-assisted commentary instruction? Basically there are two types of commentary programs. One type involves programmed reponse to students while they write, as with the WRITER'S WORKBENCH program. Another form includes programs like FOLLOW 2, which provide the traditional type of delayed response to a student theme, only by means of a printout consisting of original commentary and programmed, textbook-type commentary (Holmes 38-39). With increasing computer memory, the programs have the capacity to supplement and even replace textbooks since such programs are, in effect, textbooks whose passages are more easily retrievable for application than if they were textbooks being thumbed through; loaded with them the computer accesses and presents the composer with commentary applicable to what the writing happens to elicit. The development of increasingly more effective programs of this type will depend upon research into the new forms of applicable self-paced mastery learning theory, and research into other areas to be discussed.

How can we appraise the potential effectiveness of computer-assisted commentary programs so that we can consider how they might make a contribution to composition instruction? I suggest that we approach them in two ways: (1) by observing their characteristics as vehicles in achieving the goal of individualization and (2) by discussing them in connection with some common goals of composition instruction. I will employ these approaches for the remainder of this paper.

The individualization of instruction that is achieved through commentary programs is similar to the way a tutor might move a pupil through stages of tutoring. The commentary program provides instantaneous screened messages applicable to numerous phases of student writing; ideally, the programmed screened messages instruct students in problems that are shared by most writers at given stages of their development, thus freeing up an instructor to tutor in matters of an individual nature, for example, types of syntax expression. The second type of commentary program, operating with speedy printing of programmed responses to ordinary usage errors and problems with composing strategies, also frees up the instructor, again, to generate more comments pertaining to individual features of the writing. In addition, both types of commentary programs provide the instructor with another tool of individualization, the loading up of the instructor's assignment-specific messages. In the latter function, individualization is a matter of expanding students' consciousness of context-specific features of an assignment by being able to call attention to more of the individual features which exist in the given context. Examples of these writing context-specific features include the elements of recent class discussions and readings, the perceived elements of the audience expected for the writing, considerations of topic-suitable text structures, and the innumerable factors relating to the data bases which might be utilized in the writing.

Having dealt with their capacity to individualize instruction, let us consider how the commentary programs can help instructors to meet the common goals of writing instruction. First, though, what are the common goals? Subsuming the many subgoals of writing instruction, at least three common themes can be observed: (1) achieving competency in the expression of basic structures like sentences and paragraphs; (2) achieving competency with the forms required by those communitites which establish writing situations, i.e., research communities (documents and reports), communities of learners (essay exams), of workers (technical reports, surveys), and of consumers (press releases, advertising copy); (3) achieving creative self-expression and inventiveness in such areas as dealing with the contents of one's life, working with syntactic styles, and applying heuristic techniques to prewriting.

First, assuming that an increase in feedback time will improve writing more quickly than otherwise, the goal of achieving competency with basic usages and structures can be furthered through two possible developments. First, there is the obvious prerequisite need of institutions of learning to provide terminals and monitors to students and to expand the number of machines so that CAI tutoring is able to progress from the standpoint of servicing an increasing number of students. Second, we can assume that the more that is known about students' responses to screened messages, the better the CAI instruction will become. Research, then, needs to be conducted into the newly developing forms of cognitive reception and text production implied by keyboard composition, given the increasingly instantaneous interaction of message responses promised by the programs. To address these needs, research will need to be developed to demonstrate to us how students most effectively absorb and respond to commentary and will need to come to demonstrate the optimal learning rates involving programed commentary during each paper draft; these rates will affect the designing and redesigning of programs which are keyed to writing competency.

The second goal, that of engaging the student with workplace writing forms and contexts, can be achieved through CAI commentary programs which instruct students in the use of various data bases. Informational data bases like Compuserve are presently available in the form of newspapers and encyclopedias, as are data pertaining to the various disciplines of learning. Also, students who have moved to upper division and graduate coursework in major areas of study will be able to use the information and prescriptions of expert systems, programs offering already completed prescriptions to common problems of those areas for which prescriptions are statistical probabilities. Ideally, in addition to instructions of the use of given data bases, commentary programs could provide students with relevant lexicons and illustrations that will help them with thinking in the language of specialized fields.

At first glance, computer-assisted instruction seems alien to the third goal, achieving creative self-expression and inventiveness. The atmosphere of the typical creative writing class hardly seems conducive to CAI. Yet there are obvious connections between individualized instruction and individuality of expression. More time spent with individual development implies individuality of expression. It is reasonable to assume that if and when CAI commentary programs shorten feedback times and enable efficient instruction to lessen the time required to gain competency in writing, individuality of style will become a more easily realizable goal. Also, models for programming may come to be developed from the ideas of premiere exemplars of self-expressive writing like Montaigne and Progoff, in which case the act of writing will be seen as a process of defining one's individuality and of discovering new forms of self-expression. CAI commentary programs seem uniquely positioned to capture such processes.

Although it may come to pass that commentary programs will increasingly be demonstrated logically, such demonstration will by no means insure their professional use. Thus the question arises, what mechanism, if any, might trigger a widespread use of such programs? I would hazard to predict that that mechanism will in some way be connected with the needs implied by the well-documented history of the individualization of English instruction. As instructors become increasingly conscious of their obligations for working with composition students in this era of increasing attention paid to composition, they will wish to deal with the student needs that the commentary programs are designed to meet. Instructors desiring the development of such programs should not assume that an activity construed to have some characteristics of a fad might decline before developing; after all, some changes have occurred before in the history of English instruction.

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The Example of Gargantua: Low-Level Achiever to Model Student

By
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Gargantua and Pantagruel, Rabelais' story of loveable giants, makes a marvelous comparison between what scholarly achievement meant in the Middle Ages/the early Renaissance and in our own time. For those unfamiliar with young Gargantua's elaborate systems of education, I here outline each system.

Gargantua's extensive scholastic (medieval) education, Rabelais informs us, "actually made the lad over into a fool, a dunce, a booby and a nincompoop" (1307), although he had been at it for over 53 years and ten months with one tutor, and more with the next. In fact, when called into competition with a "modern," achievement-oriented twelve-year-old, Gargantua's "only reaction was to burst into tears. He bawled like a sick cow, hung his head and hid his face in his cap, until there was about as much possibility of drawing a word from his as . . . [obscene comparison made here]" (1308).

What system of education had turned our poor scholar into a low-level achiever, although he was daily tutored by his masters, the sophist Tubal Holofernes, and, later, the pedant Jolter Clotpoll (Jobelin Bride)? First, they created in him no sense of discipline of any kind. He woke up at leisure between eight and nine in the morning, his only exercise for the day consisting of wiggling in bed and "tossing like a parched pea" a few times (1310). Personal hygiene, he was taught, was a waste of time. Hence, combing his hair meant passing his fingers through it; washing his face or making himself clean were naturally out of the question. "Next Gargantua dunged, piddled, vomited, belched, broke wind, yawned, spat, coughed, hiccoughed, sneezed and snotted himself as majestically and bountifully as an archdeacon" (1311).

The most important order of the day was food and drink. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner were lavish affairs, since the appetite was not to be denied; moreover, tutor and pupil saluted the morning with a drink, a practice faithfully continued throughout the day.

Religiosity made up a significant part of the curriculum. This consisted of repairing to church, singing an ample number of masses and aves, collecting wagonloads of relics, and "babb[ling] the mumbo jumbo of the litany" (1311).

His soul taken care of, Gargantua proceeded to what we see as the essential part of the curriculum--his studies. He studied--a short half hour--his concentration nil, since his mind was "woolgathering in the kitchen" (1312). What and how did he study? His ABC's, which he could repeat by heart--backwards--took 5 years and three months (at the rate of half an hour a day). Other subjects were standards of the dry, pedantic scholasticism of the time: theology, scriptual commentaries, moral precepts, lexicology, grammar, and the like, written in Gothic characters by such eminent thinkers as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus. He studied, and was taught, without enthusiasm or understanding; he could recite all his texts by heart, since his head was generally elsewhere. He was, in effect, systematically trained to be a blubbering, babbling "D" student--a dunderhead, dolt, dunce, duffen, dummy, dummkopf, what we today euphemistically call a "low-level achiever."

He had to be cured, and Ponocrates, the Humanist tutor of the smart twelve-year-old lad, was the man to do it. Ponocrates started by purging the young giant's brain with a tremendous herbal dosage (would that we could do the same with some our charges), so he could start with a clear head. Next, Gargantua was carefully trained in habits conducive to a healthy spirit, body, and mind, which left him a happier and morally superior giant. The first step in becoming achievement-oriented was to emulate the most educated men of his time, and for this he moved to Paris, the seat of French learning.

He began and ended each day with a reading of the scriptures, rather than the dry commentaries, and with worshipping his Maker, thereby establishing a more personal relationship with God than under the old church-directed system. Studies and worship were effectively combined; astronomy, the study of the heavenly bodies, helped him realize the glory of God.

Cleanliness being next to godliness, Gargantua learnt to pay attention to good hygiene and grooming. Fresh and clean in person, he developed his body with all kinds of strenuous physical exercises, as well as the martial arts befitting a prince. Thus he could not only play tennis, handball, and three-conered catch; wrestle; ride; run; jump; climb trees; and swim; but also wield battle axes, swords, pikes, and the like.

He was no mere jock. He could play various sorts of musical instruments, write in Gothic as well as Roman characters, and intelligently discourse on anatomy, medicine, law, mathematics, chivalry, literature, botany; in fact, on all the known arts and sciences of his time. To absorb all this information, along with the physical and spiritual parts of his curriculum, he arose at four each morning; he ate moderate but nutritional meals, so his giant brain wouldn't grow dull and heavy. Thus, from a slothful ninny, Gargantua turned into a well-rounded, highly motivated, overachieving student, the sort of model scholar we modern-day educators secretly but passionately crave.

What lessons can we learn from the eminently succesful Ponocrates? Basic lessons that we already know, lessons that have worked for centuries, and that we need to remind ourselves of every now and then. They are as follows: To be conscientious in our duties--and we are--why else would we be in such a non-lucrative profession?; to be patient and not supercilious, in spite of our superior intelligence; to feel affection and respect for our students and hope they feel the same for us; to pay close attention to their totally humanity--their physical and spiritual health as well as mental improvement; to instil in them the value of discipline; to spend the needed amount of time with them, in and out of class; to help them understand the material without imposing on them grade pressure; to work according to their pace and not our own; to show them the possibilities of success on their level, not ours; to encourage them to emulate rather then hopelessly compete with their peers; to be aware of our place in the power hierarchy but not abuse it.

Ours is a gargantuan task. We don't have control of our students twenty-four hours a day; they are not always motivated, disciplined, or respectful; we ourselves are under publish-or-perish and family-life pressures; our multiple overall responsibilities wear down our energies in the classroom. This list is depressing, as the task of working with low-level learners sometimes is too. But, like social work, it also satisfies, we know, every time there is a breakthrough.

Whenever I feel especially frustrated, I remind myself of the words of an Argentine friend of mine, unhappy at being considered an idiot by her English professors, "I'm not dumb in my own language; my thoughts just come out slower in English." My thoughts just come out slower . . . for a multitude of reasons . . . sometimes, perhaps, the reason is <u>you</u> . . . like Holofernes and Clotpoll.

Strong accusation! How might the two pedagogues have responded to that? What advice might they have given us? Would they have said, "Drink and be damned--<u>after</u> a hard day's work, if you like, and be thankful for these underachievers--they keep you in jobs"?!

Works Cited

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Call for Curriculum Materials

The NCTE Committee to Evaluate Curriculum Guidelines and Competency Requirements evaluates curriculum materials as a service to schools, identifies outstanding curriculum materials for display at the NCTE Annual Convention, and creates a booklet containing annotated lists of outstanding curriculum materials chosen during the past three years. In addition, many of the recommended curriculum guides are entered into the ERIC database by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, which is located at NCTE headquarters.

School districts wishing to have curriculum guides evaluated should mail two copies of their guides to the NCTE Committee to Evaluate Curriculum Guides and Competency Requirements, Attention: Jane McClellan, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. In addition, the committee would appreciate two statements: one that indicates whether the guide should be considered for inclusion in the next publication of Recommended English Language Arts Curriculum Guides, K-12, and a second that describes the development of the guide, the nature of the population and community, and the guides' relationship to other curriculum materials in use. When a school district sends a curriculum guide for review, a member of the committee examines the materials carefully, reports in written form according to established criteria, and records comments on a cassette tape that is sent to the participating district.

GOOD HUNTING: A LOOK AT THE WRITING OF LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN

by
John Aylesworth

For seven years as a learning disabilities teacher in elementary schools, I believed that my primary emphasis must be the teaching of Reading. Reading, after all, was what my boys (80 to 85 per cent of my students have been male) lacked most. Because they could not cope with basal readers, or, for that matter, with street signs, the language of advertising, magazines, or even words on candy wrappers, I concentrated on hammering away at those things, at making the world of words more accessable to word-blind non-verbal young people.

I have begun to explore another direction—writing. This, it would appear, is an even weaker area for learning disabled children. Because they can't read, they can't spell, and since they have few successful experiences with words that are written, they are extremely hesitant to produce words in their own written form. They speak fairly well (sometimes too loudly and too much). So why bother to learn to write? The problem then, for me, has been where to begin.

One technique which works is to allow for periods of free writing similar to those we often find in elementary schools with Sustained Silent Reading. A period of ten or fifteen minutes is planned each day where everyone, including the teacher, must write, much like the SSR reading program. There is total freedom of choice for subject matter. The only stipulation is that the students must continue to write throughout the time period. They are not allowed to copy or to ask questions about spelling, grammar, etc. After several weeks of this, I sometimes try to give directed topics on which all must write or have the students suggest two or three topics and let each child choose one.

The results of these exercises often produce student writers who fall into two categories. First, I see the cautious type of writer. He presents a paragraph which reads like this:

> I had a dog he waos a big dog I love hem he got ran ovr and he got ovr it than a pake of dogs came ovr the hill and cillde hem.

This child is a natural storyteller. He understands narrative sequencing (something which we would have difficulty teaching him to understand with cut-and-paste basal reader ditto sheets); he has a rudimentary feel for descriptive detail (a big dog); and he has a keen sense of drama. The future work would begin with separating thoughts by punctuating, and developing those thoughts by encouraging more detail, description, etc.

The other type of writer I see most often is the runner. This child has so much to say and so much energy he doesn't know how to stop or even to slow down.

> The cat and dog was firting and the dog bit up the cat and Dad saw the cat fasct and Dad tuck the cat to the vaiet, and the vaiet sad the cat wude have to staa for a wiele Dad came back in a wiele and the cat was batr, and Dad, brut the cat home and Mom sad . . .

The story goes on for another page. It tells of several adventures the cat has when he is allowed to stay in the house. Eventually the focus shifts to further adventures of the narrator. The tale is funny and has the charm and freshness that only a child might give it. It also has no punctuation, bad grammar, some impossible spelling, and takes a fair amount of effort to translate.

But it can be done. Eventually when a reader gets used to writing such as this, he or she begins to grow used to the patterns that these writers employ and the translating process becomes somewhat automatic. Besides, other than vowel discrimination difficulties (a common learning disabilities problem and particularly a problem of children who speak the dialect of Southeastern Ohio), most of the decisions made in the two examples (except for run-on sentences) are logical. It makes as much sense to spell stay s-t-a-a or kill c-i-l-l as it does the correct way, for example. Still, the spelling is important, just as are punctuation and at least fundamental grammar. They lead toward what teachers of English call clarity and precision of language. They make communication more possible. In recognizing this, I have only begun to consider other techniques for developing better writing with difficult kids.

One familiar method to many teachers is a letter-writing assignment. The main value of this approach (besides the fact that kids like to get mail) is the concept of an exchange. A form of "modeling" occurs when a child receives a letter from a movie star, baseball player, an organization such as the Quarter Horse Association, or, perhaps most significantly, a pen-pal. The student sees and begins to comprehend correct form in sentence and paragraph structure, whether it's from a mimeographed sheet or from notebook paper. In the case of the latter, a letter from a pen-pal, the student also may make editing decisions unseen in his or her own writing. He sees his friend's mistakes clearer than his own. To ensure some quality control, the teacher will have to be involved in the pen-pal process for a time while gradually shaping changes in spelling, punctuating, etc. An easy approach which has proven fruitful for my class has been to develop pen-pal correspondences between my students and students at the other elementary school in the district. It's inexpensive (we send the letters through the district courier), it's easy if there are any changes or communication difficulties (we use the telephone), and it provides an immediate wealth of common experiences.

Another often-used method for shaping elementary writing is through the use of journals. This is something that many teachers do by allowing children a period of time each day to write. The main difference I see between how I deal with journals and the way that teachers I've talked to use them is that every night I write a response to the entries, once again "modelling" and further indicating that what has been written has been communicated and been assimilated. Most elementary teachers appear to view journals as a form of "free" writing and as a promotion of writing as a habit or exercise, without the need for a response.

I view each student's writing experience as an exchange. A recent approach I've taken is to work in conference with individual students in a question and answer format. I write down a question and the student answers or vice versa. This process continues as long as we have time or as long as it remains interesting. At no time is any spoken communication allowed. The kids seem to enjoy this process and I get to teach reading at the same time.

I am always searching for simultaneity. Most of the children that I work with are so far behind we must find ways to learn more than one thing in one time. If they are to succeed, the recovery process must be one of acceleration. Yet, that process is often a solution which my students wish to avoid. As one of my students (a cautious writer) wrote during a writing exercise that was a variation on the kind of assignment Kenneth Koch presents to children:

> I hate school. I hate math and writing and spelling. I like trucks. I like cars. I like dirt bikes. I like guns, bows, knifes. I like horses and dogs, cats and movies and wrestling. And hunting things.

What my student doesn't realize is that I like hunting things also, not necessarily so much things alive as those things both material and abstract which might lead to his success in school. He may still hate it (school) but probably he will at least like parts of it (such as writing, for instance) if he succeeds.

Last week in my mail at school I received one of those dittoed newsletters filled with teaching suggestions which arrive about twice a week and prove not to be helpful at all. This issue was on teaching writing and had the catchy title "On Your Mark, Get Set, Write!" It went on to explain in five pages how all I needed to know to teach children with learning problems to write was a five step process that included: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and sharing. It sounded so simple and yet it won't work. It won't reach at least half of my students and that is much too high a percentage. Sometimes after receiving my mail I hate school also, but I still like good hunting. Teaching writing to children, it would appear, is new territory with a multitude of possibilities as prey.

Federal Hocking Schools
Athens, OH

ANNOUNCEMENT

Judy H. Stewart, English teacher at Anderson High School in Cincinnati, has been awarded a Martha Holden Jennings Foundation Grant-to-Teachers. The $1892 award will be used to develop a series of writing workshops and seminars to be used with high school juniors as enrichment. The series will stimulate curiosity about the writing process and will foster in students a receptiveness to ways to improve their own writing skills and techniques.

The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation was founded by Mrs. Andrew Jennings of Cleveland in 1959 to foster the development of young people to the maximum possible extent through improving the quality of teaching in elementary and secondary schools. The grants are intended to encourage excellence in Ohio classroom teaching, to permit experimentation in new teaching methods, and to develop scholastic effort and creativity in students.

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RELEASING THE RELUCTANT WRITER: ATTEMPTS AT MYTH-BREAKING AND A FRIENDLY ASSAULT ON THE MOUNTAIN OF OUR OWN FEARS

by
June Langford Berkley

I am reluctant to write these pages. I hold back. I question, first, you may surmise, whether my gentle assault—my joining in this issue—will benefit anyone. Beyond that, will this writing benefit me? Typical questions from the Reluctant Writer.

But writing is learning, I argue. I have said it and believed it passionately a thousand times. I have a history of writing to discover and refine my thoughts and to share my insights and discoveries. Generally, I have met with some degree of success; people have responded positively to my writing. Why, then, am I reluctant?

Because, I answer, writing and shaping and sharing these words requires effort and it's risky. The whole process will take my time—and it's spring. I have other choices. And what if the pages I write are dull and meaningless? What if you stop reading right now!

Such are the agonies of the writer grown up. Imagine the trail of tears that led us toward this new level of dread—and hope. Writing for the eyes of others! Surely this dread and dream lies at the heart of every classroom experience; my trepidation is no different in kind from that of a third grader who is assigned a report on Tyrannosaurus Rex. How came I—came we—this distance only to hold onto our fears? The same daring and hope accompanies this writing as accompanied my first "publication"—a sheaf of three folded and unlined yellow pages filled with my earliest speculations on the nature of existence—hand sewn with black button thread at the spine and presented in my ninth year to an unsuspecting (and basically uninterested) world. The twenty-four years between that little "book" and my eventual discovery of my writing teacher in graduate school were marked by the trials, tears, terrors, and triumphs common to every writer. No matter how much we have to say, no matter what art and skill we possess, all of us at some time are reluctant writers—victims to a large extent, of a reproductive system of education that kills rather than kindles the composing spirit. Therein—in this history of my own, which began in a one-room school with a blunt nosed pencil and three purloined pages (and which yet, fortunately, has no end) the thoughtful writer/reader may discover a number of important truths about writing—and the teaching of writing. And let me hasten to add that I as teacher am personally familiar with all forms of the mis-teaching of writing. I, too, strive to shake off the inclination to imitate prescriptive and corrective pedagogical behavior in favor of an open classroom free of the hundred myths that shackle teachers and students in repressive moods.

However, for the purposes of this paper I will limit myself to the following tenents gleamed from a brief lifetime of writing and reading and talking and thinking about writing:

1. The best teacher of writing is a writer.

2. We are all potentially writers: every child—every adult, for that matter—I have ever met has been inclined to compose in language.

3. Writing is a natural act, a spontaneous manifestation of our need to compose ourselves and our universe and to make new worlds.

4. Teachers, well intentioned as we may have been, have generally done much to impede writers, to block, lock up, and shut away the most urgent—and therefore our students' best—attempt at composition.

5. The climate of many educational institutions is such that the generation, expansion, and refinement of thought/feeling in written form is often discouraged rather than nurtured.

6. In this climate (above) a premature and obsessive attention to "correct" writing rather than to "good writing" is our legacy.

7. We generally underestimate the innate abilities of ourselves and our students to generate important written discourse.

8. We need to write in a variety of modes. The limited view of writing to redispense information temporarily held in our heads must be supplanted by a more rational approach: writing to learn and discover and celebrate—and only sometimes to transfer information.

9. While some of us have easier access—through language—to our thoughts feelings than do other, languaging—including its manifestation in written form—is a natural, universal expression of our humanity.

Elevated expectations. Severe charges. Something of a lining up against the enemies? Perhaps. If we consider the enemy to be ourselves, our misconceptions and inertia—and not our students. The biggest enemy of all is the frequently verbalized excuse that certain kinds of students are not destined to write anyway, not even a coherent sentence.

There is no polite way to deal with this matter of expectation—or more specifically, with this lack of expectation. As a point of departure let me reiterate the most basic of my beliefs: we are all writers until we are discouraged by the schools. The fear of writing is established—for many—almost immediately in primary school, is imbedded at an early age, firmed up in the middle years, and announced with finality by junior high school: those that can write—meaning, sometimes, edit and punctuate—are separated clearly from the great unwashed horde that must be compelled to write something now matter how, as one teacher put it, "pitifully spelled it is."

There is something schizophrenic about a system that simultaneously denies the possibility of composition and requires by law that all students submit themselves at the altar of literacy—which certainly includes writing. Pupil performance objectives, we have decreed, will speak to this issue: all will write. In the words of one of my children's cartoon characters, "It's the most unheard of thing I've ever heard of."

In these days of accountability and competency testing, I am often called forth to help design—within the magic span of a weekend workshop—a curriculum or a course of study that will make writers—of sorts, they say—out of everyone. Because that law has said so, even the "belligerently apathetic," as one teacher labeled them, must fill up pages. Classroom teachers quickly add that the "law" has obviously never met the likes of their seventh-period juniors.

These English language arts teachers, beleagured veterans whose battle scars and forays against the Philistines cannot be denied, would like to see "the law" squeeze one sound sentence—let alone a paragraph—out of the combined intellects of a given remedial English class. They look at me expectantly; then these one-time lovers of Blake and Austin and Fitzgerald, knowing they speak/challenge me—who just might be on the side of "the law," issuing forth as I do from the university and admitting to traffic with the State Department of Education—to gainsay it: there are those civilized beings who, hearing the call to compose, volunteer and serve, at least respond to the draft (this includes those unwilling who resist, those who, despising the drummer, nonetheless march); and there are others, those who "have nothing to say anyway—even if they could spell and punctuate it," and they're best left alone with their own interests. Such teachers admit in haste that some of the great unwashed do indeed possess a certain fluency of language—perhaps they speak, albeit in curious tongues and accordingly have been known to carve a fragment on the restroom wall, but all Hell could break loose before they turned in so much as a page of description of an essay of definition.

Teachers who don't want to talk "philosophy," who insist instead that someone provide them some simple exercises to pacify the beasts on Monday morning, would do well to ask for a week-end reading list and some writing prompts for themselves. (A basic reading list might include the NCTE "Position Statement on Composition," the SLATE Starter Sheets on "Basics in Grammar and Usage," "Composition," and "Thinking," The Essentials of Education, The Essentials of English, James Moffatt's "Hidden Impediments to the Improving English Teaching" (Phi Delta Kappan, September 1985), and NCTE's Standards for Basic Skills Writing Program (English Language Arts Bulletin, Spring 1979).

We would all do well to put our swords on the table and come out writing. If we showed students our own struggles to make sense of—and wonder about and celebrate—this world and ourselves through language, they would be less self-conscious and fearful of sharing with one another and with us their own writing. In classrooms where the best writing is generated, I have usually found a teacher at work. Writing. At Arcanum High School, Marilee Pallant—whose English students have for the past three years won top honors in the state-wide creative writing contest sponsored by the Ohio Council of Teachers of English Language Arts and the Lucille Loy Kuck Fund—works away at her typewriter while students write, then offers her own manuscript up for student critique. Pallant says, "We think we have to be structuring, making things happen all the time. We need to get out of the way and let things happen." Getting out of the way means posing the right questions, offering the best suggestions, listening, probing, structuring behind the scenes and respecting what students write. One of the recipients of a Carnegie Grant for Excellence in 1985, Pallant works with students of all ability levels to discover reading and writing connections. During a two day visit in her classrooms, I discovered so-called average students posing literary questions—and offering answers—at levels of cognition and appreciation that would have gratified most instructors of college-level English classes. Pallant does not do it with clever tricks or assignments but with philosophy: empower the students, release them to their own language. Her students know from experience

that there's something powerful in the words they read and write—there is little holding back; there is much risk-taking and speculation. "I discovered," one student wrote following a discussion with the author of a short story, "that my thoughts about the theme of the story were valid, on target—not unlike the insights of the author. I like figuring these things out for myself and then comparing my ideas with other people's, even with the author's."

I do not insist that every student in a well-led classroom will become an expert writer, but every student is capable of growth. Ernest Boyer, speaking at the Philadelphia convention of the National Council of Teachers of English in 1985 called on English teachers to address this most pressing problem in American education. Boyer maintains that if by our best efforts, drawing on what we know about research and practice, we cannot graduate the majority of our high school seniors with the ability to write a reasonably extended composition—with a minimum of errors—on a significant topic, after twelve years of instruction, we should close the public schoolroom doors. In that spirit, I propose that we move quickly to acknowledge wherein the fault of our present system lies. We know who the enemy is: it is not the stars, the system, or the students alone—it is ourselves.

I propose that for the present we travel no further than ourselves—the classroom managers whose tasks and opportunities are to help students discover and cultivate and celebrate their written voices. And in that magnificent voyage, which may now be masquerading as a foray against enemy forces, let us seek renewal and rediscovery. Too often I observe classrooms where "errors" in language are viewed with rancor and the teacher-warrior does combat against academic sloth and deliberate withdrawal—not only from writing but thought itself! Let us, as Henry Reed suggests in "Naming of Parts," begin by "Easing the Spring." Let us review ourselves.

If we are to build classrooms where children realize their humanity—something that can scarcly be separated from their linguistic expression—we need to begin at the beginning.

Lee Dobson in "Learn to Read by Writing: A Practical Program for Reluctant Readers" (Teaching Exceptional Children, Fall 1985) speaks incisively to this point.

> The main thrust of most first grade curricula seems to be toward developing proficiency in reading. Progress in beginning reading, therefore, is deemed critical if a child is to have a successful year. The assumption of traditional teaching methods seems to be that children must attain a certain level of reading ability before they can be expected to print their own written communications. Teachers who base their practices upon this assumption are likely to give only children who are average and above-average achievers the opportunity to create their own written work during their first year at school. Writing is, obviously, not considered to be as important as reading at this early stage. In general, children who are slow to learn are told to copy a teacher's model or dictate their thoughts to an adult scribe. Their teachers have observed that they do not have the expertise to produce correct, conventionally written English;

therefore, they do not expect them to be able to produce written communication without direct help.

Dodson underscores the well-researched belief that young children know a great deal more about their language than is generally supposed and that their writing should be viewed as a developmental learning task. She cites the work of Henderson and Beers (1980), illustrating that children who do not suffer the interference of teachers will "produce sound/symbol representations and follow a similar path of ever-closer approximations to conventional English." That is, teachers should not consider as valid only the "correct" writing they may teach or assign. Students may be "writing" much more sophisticated compositions than those the teacher labors over in the interest of correctness. Failure to tap children's natural inclination to compose—to focus instead on assigning, correcting and evaluating their progress (or lack of progress) in the mastery of the conventions of writing will surely serve to thwart and confuse the early writer. Children whose skills in spelling and punctuation do not keep pace with their power to generate thought and to invent ways of expressing thought on paper are often labeled "remedial," when in fact their language skills—particularly their skill in written composition—outstrips their more cautious, "correct" classmates. The work of Carol Chomsky (Theory and Practice of Early Reading), Vol, 2, 1979) suggests that writing is a more self-involving task than reading and may therefore be the best point of departure for early language instruction. Writing may be the language activity most naturally agreeable to early learners—the activity they initially approach without reluctance or fear.

Another matter of equal importance to the total education experience: the teacher who observes primary children in the process of spontaneous writing is offered the opportunity to reshape his/her thinking about how children learn. That is, teachers who evoke and encourage written language—rather than assign and correct products—in/from early learners, teach themselves to build for their students a supportive, nurturing climate wherein learners experience risk-taking and rational growth, rather than control and failure.

This process of evocation and invitation and response and revision and publication creates a partnership in learning that should inform classrooms at every level, K-college. Writers of all ages who work at their levels of understanding and view themselves as writers are eminently teachable. Classroom climate—student and teacher partnership attitudes in the classroom community of language—is more important than text, tests or specific techniques. Middle schoolers who act out their deeply felt responses to an episode in inter-racial conflict in Ohio history, for example, are likely to produce journals and letters and scripts—even argumentative essays—worthy of their writing. A project in creative writing orchestrated by Dr. Jeanette Myers and Heather Cantino in the Athens Middle School, under a grant from the Ohio Program in the Humanities, enabled cooperating teacher Debby Lowe to structure oral language experience designed to promote higher level cognitive thinking skills and ultimately to facilitate meaningful written composition. Students were asked to integrate historical information and newly acquired oral and dramatic skills to generate creative solutions to multi-cultural problems in a literary-history context. After active oral engagement with problems that paralleled their own developmental stages, students wrote with new fluency and energy—with the kind of interest first graders often exhibit before they capitulate to "instruction".

Teachers who fear that "too much freedom" will result not only in loose, unstructured—even useless-papers but also in the reinforcement of "bad habits" and in the loss of valuable instructional time will be comforted and instructed by recent classroom research. Reservations about free writing activities include the fear that

journal writing will supplant real instruction and correction procedures, activities which (many think) will lead immature thinkers-writers out of the morass of their inguistic sloth and into the realms of clear thought and lucid prose. Playing around, the Puritan influence tells us, will lead to no good.

Toby Fulweiler, University of Vermont at Burlington, reported at the 1986 Conference of College Composition in New Orleans, specific activities and concomitant gains in intellectual/academic skills among student in a number of undergraduate classes. Writing instructors who used journals analytically noted that cognitive skills such as observing, speculating, questioning, digressing, revising, posing and problem solving occurred when learners explored their thoughts through writing. Fulweiler's analysis of journals written in his college classes revealed intricate expressions of confusion and doubt (legitimate steps in the thought process), as well as evidence of self-awareness, information processing, and inference making. Trust in the innate powers of self-interest and self-discovery inform the experiment Fulweiler described in his presentation, "Expressive Writing and the Literature Classroom." Teachers in K-12 could test the hypotheses that journal writing nourishes and develops thinking skills, literary appreciation and linguistic abilities by experiments with journal- centered classrooms and control groups.

In this free-spirited but subtly structured classroom, let us first release our own fears of writing, come out from behind the podium and lay our words on the table, show our students our own struggles to make sense of—and wonder about and celebrate —this world and ourselves through language. Let us attempt to regain the daring and power of self-expression. Long before we attempt the argumentative essay—and, alas, that is where too many students first encounter "serious writing," this traditional dread and challenge of the senior high school—let us explore our inner worlds and stretch our powers of observation by writing for ourselves in freeform diaries, journals, letters, logs and speculative papers to discover ourselves and the spaces and people around us. James Britton terms this "writing as discovery," or "expressive writing," and reminds us that the need to write first in this less formal, unstructured style is a reflection of the major tenents of our most respected developmental psychologists. In order to open ourselves to the rich spiraling experiences of generating written language, we need to begin to write as we began to speak—in a lively supportive environment full of lively models to imitate and celebrate. If we taught chilaren to walk or speak under the same cruel conditions we often impose on beginning writers, we would surely face a nation of "remedial walkers" and "remedial talkers." If we can accept the child's need to generate language as natural, the harsh rules for beginners, the penalties for any performance below the median, the ridicule for errors and the punishment for experimentation become barbaric rather than instructive. If we can see writing as a natural act, as natural as the need to walk, and if we can allow in that belief system the notion that writing is a natural extension and refinement of oral discourse, then we must admit that nature and example will show the way.

Over a decade of serious, well-respected research notwithstanding the climate of our time frequently opposes all scientific evidence and common sense. In too many classrooms, the so-called Basics—the skills of editing—are being substituted for attention to composing. Those who can't edit are labeled by objective tests as incompetent and full attention is turned to mastery of grammar and usage. Testing and tracking lead to more labeling and often to a permanent slot in the lower levels of learning. This get-tough attitude toward remedial education is reflected in a November 1985 Council Gram (Vol. XL, No. 2) report: many state legislators at their national conference in Seattle viewed the post-secondary remedial programs as "wasteful and ineffective" and called for a reduction in funding for such programs. Wyoming Republican Peg Shereve "suggested that students who on graduation from high school

are not academically ready for college-level study should set their sights on careers more realistic for them." Others, like Jim Scher (Colorado) called for a "tough but reasonable" stance, citing the possibility that such cut-backs would penalize minority and disadvantaged students. If decisions about childrens' futures are based on objective tests of editing alone, thousands who attended classes under the direction of "error-finding" instructors rather than in the company of educators who nurtured language growth and the flowing of composition skills, then a terrible disservice has been done, for research clearly shows that isolated drill and correction alone will not improve a student with language—and such a sterile emphasis all but guarantees that quite early in their "education," students cut off from their natural language inclinations will turn away from force-feeding and corrections—and, consequently, take on the label of "Reluctant Learners."

So, as educators, we are concerned about these legislators' definition of "remedial" English, especially if the label is applied on the authority of an objective test that measures editing skills. Of course, when we learn to devote twelve years of active attention to the languaging/composing process, our student will measure considerably higher on editing tests, too. But more importantly, such instruction will change the questions these legislators address. We will speak of thought and composing —well edited, of course. The whole spirit of education can be changed through proper emphasis on the composing process. But the change will not come without a new sense of direction and purpose and the empowerment of teachers who can lead and inspire and refine—not compel language growth.

Recently during an informal discussion that followed a national symposium on the teaching of basic (remedial) writing, a teacher who has a long history of success with all kinds of students was asked about his techniques. As is often the case, the questioner wanted a list of things to do, materials to use, prohibitions to bear in mind. Another teacher in the group answered for her colleague: "What he does is not so much do and be. It's his trusting way of looking at the world—and at his students. He teaches writing like a gardener, not an engineer."

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MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LOW LEVEL FOR ACHIEVEMENT STUDENTS

by
Maria Di Tommaso

This past year I attended an English teachers' conference. While talking to a colleague I mentioned that I was presently teaching all low need for achievement students, also known as basic classes or low achieving students. His reply was, "You must have done something very wrong for your administration to assign you to that schedule." That discussion has replayed in my mind many times to focus on the attitudes toward low level students by administrators, the public, but most importantly, by the teachers themselves. They consider it a punishment to be assigned to teach the students who have a reputation of handicapped behavior, which exhibits itself in low grades, high absenteeism and general apathy toward school and the learning process. The negative attitudes these students bring to the classroom are often mirrored by the attitudes of the teachers, reinforced by the system itself. For success in the classroom, and especially in the low need for achievement classes, teachers should bring with them several characteristics to deal positively with these students.

We, as teachers, might often be the only contact person of stability and of normal behavior that these students experience that day; therefore, let us be stable and normal. Let us be someone on whom they can count to react the same way, every time, regardless of the infraction. These are not students whom we can impress with temper tantrums and ultimatums. Most people during their entire life have reacted to them with frustration and exasperation and that type of behavior has lost its effect on them. They have learned to react to that and it is often with sullen and belligerent behavior. This behavior, they have learned, accomplishes two goals. It diverts attention from the missed homework assignment, which they didn't complete because they are "individuals who are driven by a fear of failure" (Brophy, 1983, p. 202). Teachers often see this as an excuse or laziness or disinterest, and they may be all of those; but the overt behavior is caused by the intrinsic character of these students seeing themselves as failures. One of the factors which contributes to this behavior is that individuals of "low self esteem tend to reject success if they believe they will later be obliged to repeat it" (Covington, 1976, p. 74). Their solution is not to do homework at all and accept the expected tirade from the teacher.

The behavior also reinforces and supports what they have known all along, i.e. their internalized perception of lack of self-confidence due to the phenomenon of learned helplessness.

They believe themselves to lack the ability to succeed and their ally, failure, at least has been constant and stable and on failure they have learned to depend.

At this point, it is critical for the teacher's reaction to be constant and stable and calm. This behavior from the teacher, at first, will be unexpected and confusing for the students; however, if it happens every time, they will learn to depend on it and deal with it. The consequences for the missed assignment have already been established from the beginning of the year and so, that point of discussion is mute and not a diversion. As a teacher, then, we deal with the fact that the assignment is incomplete and since they know the consequences, there is no more discussion at that point. Throughout the class period, have some verbal contact with the students, reassuring them that it is the assignment which needs to be done and that it is not personal alienation between teacher and student. This action reinforces a positive attachment between the student and the teacher.

The teacher's attitude must be positive and encouraging and in this the key is again consistency. The low need for achievement students are individuals who have as part of their personality a negative attitude about themselves and most things around them. "The ability of these helpless students to analyze the problem, and generate possible solutions was impaired by distracting thoughts of hopelessness, despair, or negative self evaluation" (Brophy, 1983, p. 204). The teacher is in control of initiating positive behavior and it must begin with the teacher. The students already know how to act negatively and they have experienced this type of behavior at home and at school from the first time that they acted differently.

The students all know in what class they have been placed and for what reason. This is one of the ways by which the system perpetuates teachers' attitudes toward the students and students' attitudes toward themselves. Once they are placed in a class of low achievers or basic or low level, they understand the expectations the system has established for them. I'm sure we as teachers have had students bemoan the fact that they can't really produce any more work because they are 'basic' students. In the first weeks of school, my students often told me that they were working too hard and that I was expecting too much of them. The point here, then, is what do we as teachers expect of them? Do our expectations reflect our shared and learned attitudes that we reinforce among each other about these classes? We should expect them to be prepared for class in every way that we expect other students to be. We should expect punctuality, ready materials, and completed work by the end of the period. The key element is the method applied to have these students exhibit these acceptable traits. This is the most difficult part. Ordinary methods don't work with these students because they are not at the stage where they are motivated by the ordinary rewards--grades, self satisfaction in a job well done, pride, accomplishment of a task. They are, however, somewhat goal oriented, albeit on a smaller, more immediate scale.

For example, on Monday the teacher will announce that if the class finishes three stories, and 90% of the students complete homework, Friday will be a movie day or pop day or whatever reward the teacher is able to handle. These rewards need not be complicated or far-fetched but something which the class really wants. Also, the goal is near and the reward is immediate. The requirements for the reward, of course, should be attainable and realistic. This activity is also non-threatening to the students since they know what to do, and what to expect if they do it. There are no surprises.

The characteristics of teachers dealing with low need for achievement students include consistent stable reactions, calm behavior, and a positive attitude.

There are several conclusions which I reached in dealing with low level achievement students. The characteristics include a high rate of absenteeism, a general apathy and negative attitude toward school and success, diversion tactics to avoid work and a high level of frustration. We, as teachers, need to act as facilitators with the students in dealing with these characteristics. Establish an atmosphere of achievable success both in the academic area and in their behavior patterns. Establish routines with predictable consequences for them. Surprises are handled poorly by these students. Be a person who is consistent and calm. Behavior which is aggressive and belligerent will elicit the same behavior from low level achievement students. I found that with these strategies and a sincere positive attitude I was able to keep the promotion rate at 94%. This statement is in keeping with positive attitude. Mention the success rate rather than the failure rate. Your students will begin to think that way, too!

To achieve that success, I developed several strategies to better help me deal with the characteristics these students possessed. The following strategies were applied on a continuing basis:

1. My Record

A goal-oriented record sheet was devised which was kept in the student's personal file. It was devised so that the student could record dates and so that it was explicit, specific and simple. "Goal proximity is especially critical" (Bandura &Schunk, 1981, p. 586). This record was taken out after every pretest and after every posttest. After recording their pretest scores, the students analyzed their work and prescribed their goal in the particular concept. Following the posttest, the score was recorded and improvement was noted in every student's performance. This also reinforced the fact that a subgoal was to create "a climate in which children were encouraged to take as much responsibility for their own behavior as they could handle." (Charms, 1976, p. 402).

2. Making Up Missed Work

The high rate of absenteeism necessitated a technique to deal with classwork missed. A folder was placed in a very prominent place, very visible, and the folder was entitled "ABSENT?" Any papers, assignments, or tests were placed in this folder when the student was absent. The student looked in the folder for the assignment with his name and date on it. It placed the responsibility of make-up work directly where it belonged--on the student. This also provided a check for the teacher because the name of the student and the date were written at the top of the paper. This further provided a check for allowance for make-up time given to the student. At the end of the week, the folder was checked for papers not completed, marked Late, and given to the student to be completed and returned. The grade for 'Late' work had already been established at the beginning of the year and adhered to.

3. Time Routine

"Some 50 to 60 percent of teachers' in-class statements are for the purpose of controlling the class: explaining rules, limiting movement, starting and stopping activities, giving orders and reprimanding behavior" (Thomas, 1980, p. 215).

A pattern was developed which was followed at least three days out of five every week. The class period was 45 minutes long and only the length of the teaching time varied. The lesson was taught for 15-20 minutes, asking the students to complete examples in their notebooks and on the chalkboard. The students then had 15 minutes to finish the exercise which would be corrected the next day. The actual interaction--teaching time was close to 50% of class time.

This pattern had several results. Student time was spent in directed guided practice with constant reinforcement of correct work being accomplished. The amount of completed work received from students has improved. Disruptions have been kept to a minimum because there was almost constant on-task time being required.

4. Evaluation Up-Date (sample included)

Every three weeks the students receive an evaluation card entitled "Evaluation Up-Date." It has student's name, number of points accumulated, conversion to a grade and any incomplete assignments. The students shared the information on each other's cards and as success was observed, many others wanted to become part of that success. This tool seemed to succeed in building self-efficacy and self-agency (Bandura, 1982, p. 129). They received feedback and information which indicated their progress and that in three weeks, the increase in their personal effort and interest could affect their performance.

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EVALUATION UP DATE
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To _____ from Mrs. Di Tommaso, English

For the period of _____, you have accumulated _____

points out of a possible _____ points.

This gives you a grade of _____.

You have/have not completed the following assignments:

NEW PROBLEMS NEED NEW SOLUTIONS

by
Susan Archer

My interest in starting our group on "hard to handle students" began when I realized that I spend the majority of my time disciplining certain groups of students instead of teaching. I became increasingly frustrated because so little learning was occuring, other students were being cheated by this, and I was inadequately trained to deal with the problems occurring in the classroom. Realizing that I was not the only one experiencing this phenomenom, I decided to send a memo, with the principal's encouragement, to fellow teachers about getting together to discuss this problem. The response was amazing--half the teachers in our school expressed interest in forming this group. The response led me to draw several conclusions. First, I realized the problem was widespread. Second, the problem affected all types of teachers. Third, there is comfort in numbers, and quite possibly I was not the failure I was beginning to feel.

The group met and the first meeting was spent identifying the problems, why they were occurring, and what, if anything, could be done to alter this situation. Generally our problems and frustrations were the same. Our students came to class unprepared--not only unprepared in skills, but these students would not even bring basic supplies and books with them. The students were apathetic, and this led to the discipline problems which took most of our time. The discipline problems varied, such as rudeness, failure to show up for detentions, defiance, disrespect toward students and peers, foul language, etc. The list was endless. These infractions seem minor until a teacher is faced with a classroom full of these students, and no special training or support is available. Last, but not least, teachers were hesitant to send disruptive students to the office because the administration was already overwhelmed with habitual problem students.

Then we explored the "why." Not being professional psychologists, we touched on several basic thoughts. There appears to be no parental support; drug use seems to be prevalent; the students lacked basic skills. Somewhere through the years the students had not achieved the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed at the high school level and unfortunately had been passed along. Drugs, being a problem of our society, definitely affected classroom behavior and achievement. We were dealing with a generation of students whose parents had also been exposed to drugs, and often times students experienced this in the home. Many parents with whom we spoke had reached the point of exhaustion and had no idea how to control their own child.

After identifying some of the problems, we discussed methods that might be employed to help eliminate some of the problems. A brief list of some of our ideas is as follows:

1. Consistency of application of school rules among faculty,
2. Alternatives to classroom detentions,
3. More communication among staff on individual problem students,
4. More counselor involvement with films, lectures, conferences, and group counseling,
5. Improving teacher skills in handling problem students,
6. More administrative involvement such as student and teacher mettings with the adminstrator present at the meeting,
7. Parent support group,
8. Improving our notification of suspensions,
9. Speaker on assertive discipline,
10. Revision of our student conduct code with fewer infractions and emphasis placed on student accountability,
11. Retention beginning sooner than the 9th grade,
12. More communication throughout the entire system,
13. Expulsion of students who are habitual offenders of the discipline code.

After forming this list, we asked our principal to attend a meeting; and, at a subsequent meeting, we asked our superintendent. Our goal in inviting these individuals was to make them aware of the problem, of our frustrations, and to discuss their philosophies on retention and expulsion. Retention is a major issue facing the school system this year, and we as a group tried to emphasize our concern that retention must begin early if a student is to achieve in later years. When it was mentioned that our curriculum needed to be redeveloped, most were in agreement, but no one was willing to let the blame be put entirely on curriculum. When it was mentioned that our standards needed to be examined, the general feeling was that they were too low already, and that in order to have the best schools possible, standards need to be higher. The group tried to impress the idea that, if a student is a continual problem, expulsion may be the

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only answer. It was pointed out that we were not denying a child his/her chance at an education because it had been offered to them and would be offered again each new semester. Sometimes a student is not ready in maturity, or because of attitude, does not want to constructively participate in school; therefore, he should be removed so as not to interfere with the learning process for other students.

Knowing that there are no easy answers to such a major concern, we are beginning to explore what steps to tackle first. We have just scheduled a professor to give five seminars on assertive discipline. Four from the group are going to attend a workshop on student and staff motivation to share with the group. With our principal, a few of us will be visiting an alternative school to decide if it might be feasible to consider in our system. The group itself will be starting some paper work to suggest a revision of our conduct code, drug intervention, review our Saturday morning detention program, and consider changes in our school suspension program. Other ideas will continue to be examined, but this is our beginning.

Thus far, I have to view this group as a success for a few reasons. The staff has come to realize that they are not islands. They see their fellow staff members sharing the same frustrations, and it makes one realize that teacher incompetancy does not reign. Even more importantly, we have managed to bring some serious problems to the attention of our adminstrative staff and superiors--problems from which we are not willing to look away anymore. Administrators are now aware of the fact that there is a serious communication problem within the system on discipline and retention and that many teachers are unwilling to jeopardize the education of the majority because of the actions of the minority. But my biggest reason for feeling that we can make this project a success is the simple fact that the administration seems willing to cooperate with us!

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TUTORING THE RELUCTANT LEARNER

by
Elaine A. Vacha

Over the past four years as a high school tutor of students with learning disabilities, developmental handicaps, and behavioral problems, I have worked with several "reluctant learners". I use this term to describe students who appear unmotivated to learn what the educational community deems important for a high school diploma. Reluctant learners generally do not complete assignments, they waste class time rather than attend to the task at hand, and generally appear totally "turned off" by school and learning.

As I consider these students, some characteristics emerge. Several students recall that in their earliest education they never found learning to be exciting. When they could no longer live up to the expectations of family and teachers, they finally gave up. Frequently they are not achievement or power motivated individuals, but are socially motivated. They generally have a low self-concept and, unfortunately by high school age, are more likely to be involved with alcohol and/or drug use. Another important characteristic is that they frequently come from dysfunctional families.

While I do not pretend to be an expert in working with reluctant learners, in fact I find them to be quite a challenge. I have found the following techniques to be helpful.

First, these young people need a highly structured environment. Goals need to be established and reinforced with clearly understood consequences. It is helpful if the student has shared in setting his/her goals and consequences.

Secondly, reluctant learners need immediate feedback on their progress or lack of it. I use ample amounts of genuine praise. Frequently these students receive very little praise in school. I try to notice any progress. Even though a student may never achieve a level that I would like him/her to achieve, I note any progress in the right direction.

Tutoring reluctant learners requires that I gear tasks to their ability and permit them to progress at an appropriate rate for themselves. Repetition is important to give them the confidence that they can achieve. I try continually to challenge without overwhelming them because expectations that are too high may turn them off, yet expectations which are too low are often resented.

Reluctant learners need much individual attention with generous amounts of eye contact. Both are important to enhance self-esteem and also to offset the emotional turmoil they face from dysfunctional families and years of failure.

It's easier to get these students to work if I "ease" them into the task. When they insist they can't do something, I often say, "Just watch me. I'm not asking you to do it yourself. Just watch." After I've gotten their attention and showed several examples, I'll begin the task and ask them to fill in one or two steps that I'm sure they can handle. Later, after having them add a step here or there throughout several examples, I'll challenge them to try one example on their own with, "I'll bet you can do it now." Easing them into the task seems to quiet their fear of failure and seems to give them the initial push to get going. Sometimes the hardest part of getting a job done is beginning it. One student walked into my room almost daily saying, "There's no way I'm doing that math today," and walked out smiling and saying, "I don't know how you got me to do it."

It helps a great deal if the student knows that you like him/her as a person unconditionally, that you are on their side, and that you will not give them more than they can handle. It also helps if they like you and are willing to please you.

I mentioned earlier that frequently reluctant learners have some history of chemical abuse. As drug and/or alcohol use progresses, I have found that students become increasingly unmotivated to learn the large amount of knowledge necessary to pass their courses. At that point, probably, treatment for their chemical use is the first step.

In working with reluctant students over the past four years, I have found therefore, that it's helpful to place students in a structured environment, offer immediate feedback, gear tasks to their own level, give individual attention as much as possible, and learn to accept each student unconditionally as an important person.

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Dear Editor:

In response to Judith Keck's fine article about escaping to Stratford for a Shakespearean experience, I would like to add a possible side trip to the Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. This could easily be included in a drama circuit for the summer either taking it in during the trip to or from Stratford. This town lies about three hours south and east of Stratford and like the Shakespearean Festival is open from May to October (with a 15% discount on tickets during May, June, September and October. This year the Shaw plays being featured in a Shaw Festival Theater (much like the one at Stratford, but smaller) are Arms and the Man, Back to Methuselah, On the Rocks, Passion, and Poison and Petrifaction. Again like Stratford there are other theaters and other dramatists being offered during the summer, namely: Gershwin's Girl Crazy, Agatha Christie's Black Coffee, Nowl Coward's Cavalcade, Ben Travers' Banana Ridge, and Philip Barry's Holiday, showing at various times at the four other theaters: Royal George Theater, Court House Theater, and a charming little boxlunch noon hour performance. There is one large hotel, The Royal George Hotel, centrally located on the main shopping street and many other quaint inns and bed and breakfasts for the theater goers. Anyone wanting further information may write to Shaw Festival Box Office, P.O. Box 774, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. This extended side trip will prove to be well worth the extra time and planning for the Shaw experience.

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